

HOME

Welcome to the summer 2020 edition of the Bulletin, whose deadline fell on the feast of St Bona – patron saint of travel agents and tour guides.

In the 12th century Bona led no fewer than nine tour groups to Spain from her home in Pisa.



She'd have had a job doing that this year. Salamanca-based Eneida Pérez shares with us the existential angst of being a 21st century guía sin grupo with whom to share the wonders of Spain.

The *precariedad* she describes is backed up by William Chislett's analysis of Spain's post-pandemic reconstruction, while Alfredo Benito assesses cómo respondió España to the health and political challenges of the virus.



University student Valentine Agostinho-Juenet was on her third year abroad in Chile when the pandemic hit: she decided to stay, and tells us why. We also reflect on the pandemic's impact on UK students and teachers, especially in the Pre-U community.

We commemorate three great writers: Luís Sepúlveda – revolutionary, Greenpeace activist and author of the delightful *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*; Miguel de Unamuno – why did it take 60 years for Arturo Barea's definitive study of him to be published in Spain?; and Borges – in the second of two essays on the maestro, Etta Selim looks at his subversion of the detective theme. In addition, Harry McKenzie seeks a moral framework in García Márquez's Crónica de un muerte anunciada.

We offer some lockdown-lifting cheer. In Memes and Mafalda Nathaniel Gardner looks at the way the Spanish-speaking world keeps smiling through the gloom. Then test your knowledge of Spanish culture by seeing how many references to plague, disease and pandemic from film and literature you recognise in our Pandemic Quiz.



Enjoy the read. If you feel inspired, contributions to the next edition are welcome by 30 September.

Cuídense,

The BAS editorial team



Crónica de la pandemia en España: capitanes a posteriori

By BAS editor Alfredo Benito

Todo el mundo vio venir la pandemia del coronavirus... a posteriori. Después de devorar durante este confinamiento cientos de artículos, opiniones, noticias, etc... (¿es que se puede encontrar algún otro tema en los medios de comunicación?) he llegado a la conclusión de que el “ya te lo dije”, fuertemente arraigado en la idiosincrasia hispana, ha alcanzado su cenit durante esta crisis sanitaria. Margarita del Val, científica del CSIC (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas), -institución, por cierto, bajo cuyo paraguas se desarrollan en la actualidad al menos tres proyectos de investigación para obtener una vacuna contra la Covid-19- expresaba hace unos días de forma meridiana lo que ahora muchos tratan de negar: *“Si una semana antes de decretar la alarma nos dicen que nos confinan a todos, no hubiésemos hecho ni caso. Lo veíamos en China y pensábamos, ¡qué exóticos, estos chinos están locos!”*.



Lo cierto es que el Gobierno de Sánchez, al igual que la mayoría de los grandes países europeos, hizo gala de un cierto desdén y, por qué no decirlo, de cierta arrogancia occidental cuando, por ejemplo, el 30 de enero la Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS) emitía una alerta de emergencia internacional y advertía a los países de la necesidad de dotarse de equipamiento sanitario ante la posibilidad de una expansión de la epidemia. El Ministerio de Sanidad de España no sólo aseguraba estar más que

preparado para cualquier contingencia sino que a mediados de febrero ponía el grito en el cielo ante la clausura forzada del *World Mobile Congress* en Barcelona.

Eso sí, puestos a repartir ‘carnés de irresponsabilidad’, habría que ampliar la mirada crítica no sólo al Gobierno sino a la sociedad española en su conjunto. Basta con tirar de hemeroteca para recuperar la catarata de epítetos y adjetivos gruesos que se dedicaron en aquellas fechas a las empresas que decidieron boicotear el evento desde todos los sectores de la sociedad.



El 7 de marzo, la víspera del Día de la Mujer, en España las cifras hablaban de 430 contagiados y 8 fallecidos. ¿Panorama suficiente para clausurar eventos masivos como la manifestación del 8-M? A día de hoy la respuesta sería evidentemente afirmativa. Pero ese fin de semana se celebraron miles de eventos deportivos masivos -80.000 personas en el Camp Nou para ver un

Barcelona-Real Sociedad- y, por ejemplo, un acto de Vox en Madrid con 9.000 personas en el que el tema principal no fue el coronavirus, no, sino un “ataque frontal al feminismo radical” (titular del diario El Mundo).

La disputa política cainita -con el Covid-19 como único tema del orden del día- arranca pues en España bajo la sombra del 8-M. Primero, la acusación al Gobierno de ser cómplice del contagio masivo al permitir la celebración de la manifestación. Inmediatamente después, la pirueta dialéctica que obró el milagro: los mismos que ignoraban -incluso en documentos oficiales sanitarios como el de la Comunidad de Madrid el 5 de marzo- el alcance de la pandemia ahora señalaban a Sánchez como un incauto por no dar importancia a lo que estaba pasando en China e Italia.

Los pecados veniales del Gobierno español -compartidos con otros tantos gobiernos de su entorno- dieron paso a pecados más capitales. Para los ritmos de la política y la burocracia, los seis días que tardó Pedro Sánchez en decretar el estado de alarma no parecen muchos. Pero las costuras se le empezaron a ver al sistema sanitario de forma vertiginosa. Ante la primera avalancha de infectados, la Sanidad española -la joya de la Corona de nuestra democracia- saltó por los aires: no había capacidad para hacer test fiables, no había



camas UCI suficientes, no había equipos de protección profesional para los especialistas, y casi por no haber no había ni mascarillas ni guantes. El caos.



Las prisas son malas consejeras y si sales de compras con cara de cliente fácil lo normal es que te estafen. Y con el Gobierno de España se cebaron -pronto descubriríamos que algo similar le había pasado también al Reino Unido, Alemania o Francia-. La primera, en la frente: 640.000 test devueltos por poca fiabilidad. Munición suficiente para cualquier oposición política, y especialmente para la de un país tan cainita como este. Pero el cainismo en tiempos de pandemia cobra una dimensión exagerada.

Mientras en países vecinos como Portugal la oposición conservadora tendía la mano al Ejecutivo socialista, en el Congreso español se abría la caja de Pandora: insultos y acusaciones de todos los colores. El momento tristemente álgido, el de una diputada del partido ultraderechista Vox que el 16 de abril acusó al Gobierno literalmente de ejecutar “una eutanasia feroz” contra los ancianos de las residencias. El último recuento deja más de 19 mil muertos en residencias, las cuales son gestionadas en su mayoría por grandes empresas privadas y cuya competencia recae en las Comunidades Autónomas.



Los golpes le llegaban al Gobierno no sólo por el flanco derecho sino también por el nacionalista. El presidente catalán, Quim Torra, además de votar en contra de forma reiterada en el Congreso a la aprobación del Estado de alarma y, por tanto, de la aplicación efectiva del confinamiento -bajo el argumento de una recentralización del Estado-, denunció en la BBC que el Gobierno español no estaba aplicando el confinamiento. Una declaración falsa que agrietó aún más las diferencias políticas entre quienes más pronto que tarde deberán sentarse en una mesa de diálogo para solucionar el espinoso tema de Cataluña.

Hablando de diálogo, y ante la catástrofe económica en ciernes, Pedro Sánchez sacó del cajón de los recuerdos el término Pactos de la Moncloa. En el imaginario ibérico, la última vez en que casi todo el arco parlamentario dejó a un lado sus diferencias ideológicas por alcanzar un bien común mayor. El objetivo, remar todos juntos en la reconstrucción económica y social del país. Y contra todo pronóstico y pese a las voces iniciales discrepantes, la izquierda y la derecha acordó al menos poner en marcha la bautizada como *Comisión para la Reconstrucción poscovid-19*.

Una vez alcanzado el pico de la pandemia, a finales de marzo, se entraba en la llamada fase de “desescalada”. Y ahí comenzó el tercer capítulo de las disputas políticas. El Gobierno iba diciendo qué comunidades estaban preparadas para avanzar y cuáles no en base a unos criterios médicos y científicos. Curiosamente esta vez ni Cataluña ni Castilla-León (gobernada por los conservadores) pusieron pegas a la decisión del Gobierno de no permitirles avanzar en el desconfinamiento, pero sí Madrid.

Su presidenta, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, se convirtió en el símbolo de la oposición a Sánchez. Una fotografía suya en portada de un diario nacional vestida de negro y con gesto de tristeza fue sin duda una de las imágenes de esta crisis. Después vendrían sus problemas para explicar por qué llevaba más de dos meses



viviendo en una suite de lujo de un hotel de un conocido empresario -al precio irrisorio de 80€ la noche-, o su incitación a la ciudadanía a salir a la calle a manifestarse contra el Gobierno pese a las estrictas reglas de distancia social.

En la segunda mitad de mayo las buenas noticias -los muertos diarios se sitúan por debajo de la centena y el nivel de infección se reduce drásticamente- aceleran la desescalada y aumentan el optimismo de la población y, por tanto, el peligro del rebrote. Al Gobierno le cuesta cada vez más prorrogar el estado de alarma, ya que el Partido Popular de Casado le da la espalda de forma definitiva; sin embargo, Sánchez recupera de forma inesperada un viejo aliado: el nuevo Ciudadanos de Inés Arrimadas. El próximo 21 de junio, 99 días después, España pondrá el punto y ¿final? a un periodo extraordinario y convulso que puso al país al borde del precipicio. A la espera de una posible segunda ola en otoño, el verano aparece en el horizonte como una breve y deseada tregua que, sin embargo, puede mostrar a los españoles que quizás durante un tiempo nada volverá a ser igual.

En definitiva, como apuntaba Miquel Barceló, uno de los artistas españoles más internacionales, en esta crisis inédita ha faltado “una mirada global sobre este tema. El virus sí tiene esa mirada global. Los virus son más listos y más antiguos que nosotros...”

y más demócratas”. Muchos científicos auguran que hemos entrado en la “era de la pandemia”. Esperemos que los muchos errores hayan servido para que globalmente aprendamos la lección.





Politically fractured Spain's pressing need for consensus post COVID-19

William Chislett

Senior Research Fellow Associate at the Elcano Royal Institute | @WilliamChislett3

The Bank of Spain's sensible call for a broad political agreement lasting several legislatures on measures to meet the enormous economic challenges, as a result of the devastating impact of COVID-19, looks as if has fallen on deaf ears even before getting off the ground.



Two days after Pablo Hernández de Cos, the Bank's governor, made his plea in parliament on 18 May the minority left-wing coalition government won sufficient backing to extend its state of emergency and hence lockdown restrictions until 7 June, including tacitly from the pro-Basque independence party EH Bildu, in return for completely scrapping the 2012 labour market reforms of the conservative Popular Party.

So much for negotiating with all economic agents and achieving a consensus, which would give Spain credibility in markets. And, it subsequently turned out, the abstention of Bildu's five MPs was not even needed, as there were enough 'yes' votes to get another extension over the line.

The CEOE employers' federation lambasted the deal for having a 'profoundly negative impact on jobs'. The reforms, which cut severance pay and gave priority to company-level rather than sector-wide negotiations, are credited with strengthening Spain's recovery from the 2008 global financial crisis and helping to create 2 million jobs, albeit many of them temporary.



Nadia Calviño, the Economy Minister and the guardian of orthodoxy in the government (she is a former EU Director General for Budget), was also not happy. The government issued a 'clarificatory note' with less sweeping language in an attempt to calm employers. She said that taxpayers paid politicians to solve problems not create new ones.

Successive Spanish governments have been particularly prone to overturning the reforms of their predecessors, particularly in the areas of labour market, education, taxes and town planning. For example, governments in the last 40 years have passed more than 50 labour market reforms of one sort or another, apparently a world record.

'The labour market is exhausted with so many reforms,' says Marcos Peña, a former head of the Economic and Social Council. 'And sick of every political swing entailing a labour-market reform. All this to-ing and fro-ing of reforms and counter-reforms simply brings in its wake a jittery labour market, in expectation of solutions, always mid-way to somewhere.'

Spain is in a particularly vulnerable position for four reasons.

First, Spain's economy went into the COVID-19 crisis in a weak state: the fiscal deficit was 2.8% of GDP in 2019 (it took a decade to get it below 3%, the EU's threshold now discarded), a worse starting position than other EU countries, public debt reached 95.5% of GDP and unemployment was 14%.

Second, the weight of the crisis-hit sectors, particularly tourism (12% of GDP and 13% of jobs), is greater in Spain than in the other big euro zone countries (Germany, France and Italy).

The social distancing measures have acutely affected the sectors related to hotels, restaurants and leisure. Overall, the sectors most affected by the pandemic account for around 25% of GDP.



Third, the corporate structure has a comparatively higher weight of SMEs than most other euro economies: in 2019 90% of companies had fewer than 10 employees, compared with 75% in Germany. As a result, firms are more vulnerable to the loss of income as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, as they have less access to external financing and higher overheads relative to turnover.

Fourth, the pandemic crisis has once again sharply highlighted that, as in previous recessions (GDP shrinkage this year is put at around 9%), job destruction falls disproportionately and unfairly on temporary employees (more than one-quarter of jobholders). These workers can count on very little protection once their contract expires, unless exceptional steps are taken.

The EU's special recovery fund will not be a panacea and without reforms will be wasted. Consensus is vital, but politics is bitterly polarized and fragmented (16 parties are represented in parliament), and the discourse is little more than insults.

The most immediate challenge is to forge an agreement on the budget for 2021. The fiscal deficit is forecast to surge to 10% of GDP this year as a result of massive spending on measures such as healthcare, the temporary lay-off arrangement known as ERTE benefiting some 3.4 million people, unemployment subsidies (the jobless rate is forecast to reach 20%) and the cost of deploying a minimum living income plan, while revenue is plummeting.

The 2018 budget is still in force, as it was rolled over in 2019 and this year, because of the lack of agreement on new budgets. If parliament rejects the draft 2021 budget, as happened in February 2019, it could trigger an early election – the fifth in five years.

Clearly, taxes have to rise. Spain's tax burden at 35.4% of GDP is much lower than the EU average (see Figure 1), although marginal personal tax rates are similar to the bloc's average. The problem lies with the effective tax rates for individuals and companies because of exemptions, deductions, rebates and loopholes, as well as fraud.

Figure 1. Tax-to-GDP ratio, 2002, 2007 and 2018 (1)

	2002	2007	2018
France	44.1	44.5	48.4
Italy	39.7	41.5	42.0
Germany	39.6	39.3	41.5
EU	38.6	39.2	40.3
Portugal	33.9	35.0	37.2
Spain	34.1	37.3	35.4
United Kingdom	33.2	35.0	35.1
Ireland	29.1	32.1	23.0

(1) The sum of taxes and net social security contributions as a percentage of GDP.
Source: Eurostat.

The Popular Party's tax reductions approved in 2014, at a time when the structural deficit had not been corrected and the country was coming out of its last recession, was demagogic. That deficit (not related to cyclical factors) at the outset of the pandemic

crisis was still high at around 3% of GDP, and will rise. The demand for healthcare expenditure will be greater, spending on pensions will increase due to the combined impact of an ageing population and the suspension of the application of the revaluation index and the sustainability factor, and the minimum living income is an extra cost.

Social expenditure is highly oriented in Spain towards the elderly. Family benefits in Spain are the lowest in the EU, and tax deductions are of limited advantage. Pension spending is set to rise significantly if the departures from the 2013 pension reform become permanent and no adequate compensatory measures are taken, the European Commission warned in its latest report on Spain[1].



The education system, with an early school leaving rate of 17.3% (30.3% in 2006), still the EU's highest, is another political football that is constantly kicked around by governments, to the despair of parents, and in need of a lasting pact. Reforms have made little difference. A particularly weak area is vocational training (VT), especially in a country with

seasonally adjusted youth unemployment rate of 30% before the pandemic crisis. According to the OECD, 33% of students in Spain in 2018 were VT qualified compared to an EU average of 46%, despite the country having double the proportion of students whose formal education ended at 16 (40% against 19%).

Last but not least, the pandemic has exposed the longstanding shortcomings of an underfunded justice system bogged down by mountains of paperwork, antiquated technology and long delays before cases come to trial (up to 10 years in some cases), and which will be deluged when life is back to some kind of normality.

In short, these problems can be better tackled with cross-party, long-term agreements. Spaniards deserve better of their politicians.

[1] Available at https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-csr-comm-recommendation-spain_en.pdf



Y volveremos a pisar las calles...

Una joven guía reflexiona desde la soledad de una España sin turistas.

Eneida Pérez

**Guía Oficial de Turismo de Castilla y León | Profesora de español para extranjeros |
eneidatours@gmail.com**

En España, de toda la vida, se dice, se cuenta, se rumorea: “si consigues ser funcionario, tienes la vida resuelta”. “Fulanita se pasa estudiando sin parar diez horas al día de lunes a domingo desde hace ya cuatro años pero, después, cuando apruebe la oposición, a vivir como una reina el resto de su vida”. “Ser funcionario es una suerte, pero ser emprendedor... buff, vivir con tanta incertidumbre... Yo no podría”.

Mitos como “un autónomo nunca se pone enfermo, tiene que trabajar sea como sea” o el lema “la seguridad y un sueldo fijo es lo más importante para disfrutar de una buena vida”, son solo algunos comentarios que todos hemos oído desde siempre.

Y así podríamos seguir un buen rato hablando de todas estas creencias con las que desde niños se nos ha estado apabullando y adoctrinando, con o sin razón. Está claro que cada persona es un mundo y cada cual puede encontrar la felicidad en un camino o en el otro. Pero, ¿acaso no hay vida más allá de lo fijo, de lo certero? ¿Se puede disfrutar incluso de la incertidumbre? ¿Podremos



ser capaces de mirar al futuro con optimismo incluso cuando el mundo se desmorona bajo nuestros pies y sobre nuestras cabezas?

Según el I Informe sobre “Emprendimiento y empresas jóvenes que crean empleo”, elaborado por SGR-Cesgar, en España, tan solo el 5,5% de las personas ocupadas han emprendido su propio negocio. De ese total, el 62,4% son hombres, frente a un 37,6% de mujeres.



Es evidente que se trata de una cifra extremadamente baja. La gran carga impositiva, la dificultad por abrirse camino entre una marabunta de empresas que conforman la competencia y, sobre todo, la inseguridad, hacen que sea una heroica aventura tomar el camino del trabajo por cuenta propia y ser “tu propio jefe”, a pesar de las muchas ventajas que

ello conlleva.

Bien es cierto que la incertidumbre es la gran compañera de cualquier emprendedor en España. Y, por si fuera poco, la gran crisis y alarma sanitaria provocada por el inesperado y asombrosamente global Covid-19 hace que ya no solo sea el autónomo o empresario el que viva en este agotador estado de inquietud y desasosiego, sino que todos los ciudadanos del mundo no sepan a qué atenerse en los próximos días, semanas o meses.

Con este panorama tan aparentemente desolador ante nosotros, que golpea con toda la fuerza al sector turístico y condiciona el mero hecho de viajar incluso a la ciudad de al lado, la pregunta es: ¿debemos organizar planes con la que está cayendo? ¿Qué hacer con nuestras sagradas vacaciones? ¿Van a pasar a un segundo plano cuando lo más prioritario es protegerse y sobrevivir a este “bichito” con nombre regio? ¿O vamos a darle uso al célebre *carpe diem*? ¿Qué pasará cuando volvamos a la que ya acostumbramos a llamar “nueva normalidad”? Porque... ¿acaso no estamos deseando hacer las maletas, meter nuestro bañador y las chanclas de la playa en ella para, billetes de avión o tren y mapita en mano, irnos a descubrir mundos nuevos? Eso sí... cuando nos lo permitan...

Y yo, que escribo estas líneas, soy una mujer joven que decidió hacer caso omiso a las recomendaciones que desde niña había oído a todo el mundo sobre lo importante que es tener un “trabajo fijo” y esa “seguridad laboral” que se consigue siendo un funcionario o teniendo un contrato indefinido por cuenta ajena (modalidad que desde hace años se encuentra cada vez más en peligro de extinción), para dedicarme en cuerpo y mucha alma a mi verdadera pasión: ser guía de turismo en España.

Y me preguntaréis... ¿te gusta?

Pues sí, este es el trabajo de mis sueños. ¿¡Qué puede ser más hermoso que dedicarme a investigar y aprender más y más de la ciudad que me vio nacer, del lugar donde crecí y por donde me paseo día a día!?

Salir cada mañana a recorrer y pisar bien fuerte las calles y poder transmitir a mis clientes qué se siente por el mero hecho de ser “de aquí”, qué significa vivir en este lugar, mostrar el camino para saber apreciar su arquitectura, sus vestigios casi divinos, darle la oportunidad a los turistas que hasta aquí llegan de asomarse a la larga e intrincada Historia de estas tierras, tejida durante siglos por reyes y vasallos, hombres y mujeres que con sus logros y desventuras nos han hecho ser como somos.

Ahondar en la idiosincrasia de nuestras gentes, en el entorno natural que nos ha moldeado, en nuestras tradiciones (las que aparecen marcadas en el calendario y que aún seguimos celebrando por todo lo alto, así como otras que ya quedaron relegadas al olvido), hablar de la sabrosa gastronomía hasta que se nos hace a todos la boca agua, comentar nuestras costumbres, las creencias, la forma con que nosotros sabemos disfrutar de la vida, tanto en vacas gordas, como en flacas.



Y es que el trabajo de un guía de turismo es precisamente el de condensar, cohesionar y transmitir todo ello en unas pocas horas para que el visitante pueda llevarse una idea clara y, sobre todo, auténtica de lo que significa ser “de aquí”. Que tras la visita guiada, un turista pueda saber elegir cómo aprovechar su tiempo libre para probar y saborear un pedacito del estilo de vida de la ciudad y convertirse, aunque tan solo sea durante un ratito, en “uno de los nuestros”.

En momentos tan críticos como los que estamos pasando todos, no puedo evitar pararme a pensar y preguntarme: “¿hice lo correcto dedicándome a este trabajo tan incierto?, ¿merece la pena?, ¿es nuestra labor necesaria?, ¿podremos sobrevivir en este sector?”. Y la respuesta a todas estas preguntas, al menos para mí, es un rotundo SÍ en mayúsculas.

Sí, porque uno tiene la obligación casi moral de dedicar su vida a lo que le gusta hacer ya que, casi con total seguridad, será lo que mejor sepa desempeñar. Y en tiempos de incertidumbre, quizá sea esa la única gran certeza que uno puede tener.

Por supuesto que merece la pena apostar por ser feliz, porque pasamos gran parte del día trabajando y ¡qué puede ser mejor que ocupar tantas horas realizando algo que te hace realmente sentir bien al final de la jornada! Y sí que es un trabajo necesario. Dar a conocer nuestra cultura a otros que la imaginan probablemente de una forma distorsionada y estereotipada, incluso dar la oportunidad a muchos vecinos de un lugar

que quizá no sepan mucho de su propia Historia porque nunca se han parado a pensar en ello.

Porque tenemos la tendencia de viajar muy lejos y, en cambio, desoír lo que las calles por las que caminamos a diario nos tienen que contar, lo que las casonas y palacios, que raramente y por muchos años que pasen nos paramos a admirar detenidamente, han vivido a lo largo de los siglos, o el porqué de esas festividades y romerías que celebramos con tanta alegría y boato, sin conocer muchas veces el origen de las mismas.

Así que, en efecto, nuestro trabajo es importante, mucho, y, nosotros, los profesionales del turismo somos los primeros que debemos entenderlo así y valorarlo.

Por último, ¿sobreviviremos? Por supuesto que sí. Al más puro ritmo de la grandiosa Gloria Gaynor, *We will survive* porque siempre ha sido así, porque un virus y sus consecuencias no serán tan fuertes como para arrebatarlos de cuajo nuestros deseos de viajar, de conocer nuevos mundos, otras gentes y diferentes formas de vida. Porque, como diría Garcilaso de la Vega, “busquemos otros montes y otros ríos, otros valles floridos”, no dejemos de hacerlo.

Y pronto volveremos a pisar las calles. Y volverán los turistas con sus gorros y gafas de sol, con su cámara de fotos al cuello y unas ganas locas de disfrutar de unas merecidísimas vacaciones, momentos de descanso, relax, placer y diversión. Días de vino tinto y croquetas de jamón ibérico. De risas y recuerdos inolvidables.



Sí, tengo claro que eso volverá, más pronto que tarde. Pero, de momento, toca cuidarnos, ser pacientes, no dejar de soñar con el próximo viaje y, ante todo, nunca jamás perder la esperanza.

eneidatours@gmail.com



My Year Abroad en tiempos de Coronavirus

By Valentine Agostinho-Juenet, reading Business and Spanish at Glasgow University

Greetings from Santiago de Chile, where part-way through my Year Abroad the pandemic arrived.

I had just three weeks left of my three-month traineeship in a marketing agency when Covid19 first appeared here. We started to work remotely several days before the quarantine was imposed by the Chilean government. At first, I was not given many tasks to do, but my responsibilities evolved quickly and I ended up having an even larger workload than before. Even though I could not be at the office and interact face to face with my co-workers, I still got to learn in a different way. I had to analyse how the agency's competition was dealing with the virus in order to offer ideas on how to respond to it in the best way possible for all areas of their business.



Most of my university friends returned home from their years abroad when the pandemic struck, but I took the decision to stay in Santiago. There were fewer cases here than in Europe, it was summer rather than winter here when it began and sharing a house with other young people made quarantine feel more like a summer camp than what you might expect. I was initially to go home to France at

the end of April after travelling in Peru at the end of my work placement, but I chose to stay in Santiago for my own wellbeing

The daily activities? Lying in the sun in the garden, trying new recipes from Chile all the way to Mexico, entertaining the neighbours with funny yoga postures and sweaty burpees, and being motivated to wake up from Monday to Friday as everybody connected to their laptop to follow a class or meeting. Friday and Saturday nights were still fun, I could do sports with buddies and force myself to get some work and studying done motivated by those working around me.

All those details can seem superficial, but they were what made life still ‘normal’. Maintaining a work routine, interspersed with moments of relaxation, actually made the weeks fly past.

While most European countries underwent total lockdown, the restrictions were more flexible here and people mainly stayed at home voluntarily. This meant I was able to do some little things I could not do back home, like going for a jog or having a restricted-committee picnic at the park near my house.



Most of all, I am keeping up with my main target of this year: improving my Spanish. I am getting more fluent by chatting with everybody around the house and discovering the local dishes and TV shows typical of Chilean families. Living in a house in a Latin American capital enables me to learn a lot about the Hispanic culture in general. With six different nationalities in the house, I am discovering the streets of Mexico by looking



at my housemate’s home pictures and learning how to make proper quesadillas. I am learning some Catalan while watching *Merlí* with the Spanish ones. Also, we all get to laugh together during embarrassing vocabulary confusions, such as when the Spanish girl tells the Venezuelan one she is very *mona* (in Spain, *mona* means ‘nice’; in Venezuela,

it means ‘conceited’).

Financial considerations were also a factor. I had originally been planning to go home to work while living at my parents’ house. Instead, I started to teach online language classes. From previously having just one face-to-face student before the pandemic, I made myself into a proper teacher by thoroughly preparing each of my classes and organising my folders full of grammar rules and exercises.

What lesson did I learn from the Coronavirus pandemic? Unforeseen situations can come up, but we need to stay calm and think about the pros and cons of each potential solution. Our plans and objectives may change, but we can always learn from the new paths we are taking, both personally and professionally. Even though there can be disappointment when our plans don't work out, unforeseen events can bring us many positives and teach us lessons through experiences we will remember for life.



The Pre-U that wasn't... and the one that will be.

By BAS Editor Robin Wallis

¡Pobres candidatos! What a pain to have no exams.



Okay, you're not missing the stress of being examined in three or four subjects in May/June. However, as you'd probably admit, preparing for an exam is top-notch mental fitness training, as satisfying in its way as a gym workout. Going into the exam room and nailing it on the day is like, well, scoring a 50 for your cricket team (or even a century, if you get a D1). So not having the chance to do that – it's tough, on you, and your support team. Especially when you have delved so deeply into your chosen speaking presentation, cultural topic and literary text.

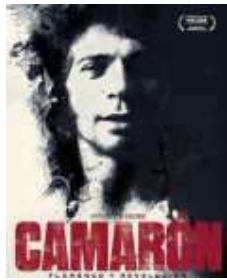
Reading Spanish at university would be a fine way to make up for it...

Meanwhile we hear that on-line classes for the 2021 candidates have been going great guns. At the time of writing it's not yet clear whether Pre-U 2020 papers will be released for past-paper usage – a nice bonus if they are.

At least we can be confident that exam boards and exam centres will be ready for the 2021 session, even if the dress code for the speaking exams has to be biohazard chic.



The 2021 candidates will be working to the same syllabus as this year, which means one last crack at *Bodas de sangre*, *La tía Julia...*, *Lazarillo...*, etc.



Beyond that, the 2022-4 syllabus takes the 2019-21 innovations a step further. We hear that the thrillers of the *Dictadura y el individuo* Topic are proving gripping subject matter, while the *Cantantes icónicos* Topic allows flamenco, one of the greatest expressions of Spanish culture, to be examined for the first time, alongside the best of South American folk and Mexican ranchera.

In the Texts section the short Argentine novel *La villa* has many of the same qualities that make García Márquez's *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* such an ideal work for Sixth Form study. The Sabina lyrics collection offers a fine introduction to the maestro whose *Pongamos que hablo de Madrid* and *¿Quién me ha robado el mes de abril?* became anthems of this year's pandemic lockdown in Spain.



Our November 2019 edition carried a fuller [review](#) of the new options.



Lastly, we send commiserations to those who had great trips planned to the Spanish-speaking world this summer. Those heading abroad to community outreach projects in particular will be missing out on a momentous life experience, and your hosts will sorely miss

you. If you're worried the opportunity might not come round again, let us know and we'll see what we can coordinate through the Bulletin.





Sepúlveda: De Ovalle a Gijón

By BAS editor Francisco Compán

A principios del mes de abril, mientras leía la prensa local asturiana, me enteré de que habían ingresado a Luis Sepúlveda en el Hospital Universitario Central de Asturias con síntomas de Covid-19. Ese mismo día, también me enteré de que el celebrado escritor, periodista y cineasta chileno llevaba viviendo en Gijón, una ciudad a escasos veinte minutos de donde yo nací, desde 1997 y me sentí extrañamente culpable por no haberlo sabido antes.

Fue a raíz de esto que empecé a interesarme más por la persona y por las excepcionales experiencias que le llevaron al exilio tan lejos de su Ovalle natal. Su padre, también Luis, era el dueño de un restaurante y militante del Partido Comunista de Chile, y su madre, Irma, era una enfermera de origen mapuche. Como él mismo decía, nació “rojo, profundamente rojo” pero confesó la gran influencia que había tenido de su abuelo paterno, “un anarquista andaluz maravilloso y un tío que fue voluntario en las Brigadas Internacionales en España y cuyo único patrimonio fue una foto donde aparece con Hemingway”. Así que su compromiso político empezó desde muy temprana edad.

Realizó una parte de sus estudios universitarios en la Escuela de Teatro de la Universidad de Chile, donde se tituló como Director, y los completó años más tarde en Alemania al cursar una Licenciatura en Ciencias de la Comunicación en la Universidad de Heidelberg. Aunque como él mismo dice, la mejor formación para un buen escritor es la vida misma, viajar y tener nuevas experiencias que enriquezcan la creatividad literaria. En su caso, hubo una mezcla de viajes de descubrimiento de Punta Arenas a

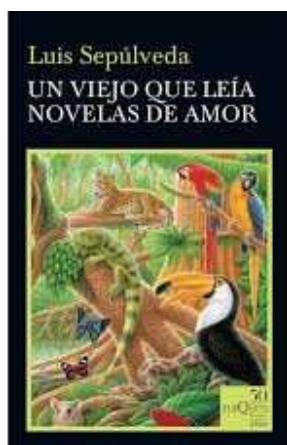
Oslo y de Barcelona a Quito, que hizo en su juventud y que contrastan con años de exilio forzado.



Su activismo político, al que se sumó el ecológico, estuvo estrechamente vinculado al Chile de los años 60 y de los 70 que vieron el golpe de Estado de Pinochet en 1973. Ligado a los movimientos revolucionarios, al gobierno de Unidad Popular y militante de las juventudes del Partido Comunista, Sepúlveda fue hecho prisionero en Temuco durante el golpe y fue encarcelado durante 3 años por la dictadura militar. Gracias a la intervención de

Amnistía Internacional, su pena de 28 años de cárcel fue conmutada por 8 años de exilio, para finalmente dejar Chile en 1977. Como dijo el escritor “tenía que ir a Suecia, pero me bajé en Buenos Aires. Allí la situación estaba peor, así que me fui a Montevideo, luego a Brasil y después al Pacífico. A dedo, en bus, en tren; crucé a Paraguay, Bolivia, Perú, Ecuador, donde me quedé algún tiempo”. En ese país ingresó en la Brigada Internacional Simón Bolívar, con la que partió a Nicaragua a principios de 1979 para participar en la Revolución Sandinista.

Tras el triunfo de la revolución del FSLN, se mudó a Hamburgo en Alemania donde con mucho esfuerzo consiguió trabajo como corresponsal de prensa. Su estilo de escritura con tendencia a mezclar la realidad con la ficción le llevó gradualmente a escribir relatos, obras de teatro y alguna novela. Allí vivió catorce años, se casó con Margarita Seven, con quien tuvo tres hijos, se incorporó al movimiento ecologista, y, cruzó los mares del mundo en los años ochenta trabajando para Greenpeace.



Pero fue su experiencia en la selva de Ecuador donde convivió con los indios Shuar, gracias a un proyecto subvencionado por la UNESCO, lo que tendría una influencia clave en Sepúlveda y dejaría una huella permanente en su creación literaria. Tras la publicación de su novela *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor* en el año 1989, traducida a treinta y tres idiomas, Sepúlveda se convirtió en uno de los escritores en lengua española más leídos en todo el mundo – aunque, como sucede con tanta frecuencia, no fue profeta en su tierra, teniendo su éxito más trascendente en el extranjero y no en Chile.

La obra que le dio a conocer, *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*, es una historia repleta de aventuras ambientada en la selva ecuatoriana, en el mundo de los indios amazónicos Shuar y que está íntimamente ligada a la relación entre el ser humano y la naturaleza.

Es un homenaje a todos los indígenas y a su forma de vida, que contrasta con la ignorante invasión de lo que solemos llamar civilización.

Patagonia Express, Historia de una gaviota y del gato que le enseñó a volar, Desencuentros, Historias marginales, Historia de un caracol que descubrió la importancia de la lentitud y El fin de la historia son unas de las cerca de cuarenta obras que nos dejó con un lenguaje directo, cautivador y lleno de anécdotas para ilustrar su preocupación por el desequilibrio del planeta y el futuro de la humanidad. Para Luis Sepúlveda, la obligación del escritor era “contar bien una buena historia y no cambiar la realidad, porque los libros no cambian el mundo. Lo hacen los ciudadanos”.



Después de demasiadas semanas de lucha incesante contra el maldito coronavirus, moría el 16 de abril de 2020 en la Asturias en la que encontró su casa, dejándonos una herencia humana y literaria inigualable. Como se suele decir en estas ocasiones, siempre se van los mejores, pero esta vez es verdad.



In Spain at last: Arturo Barea on Unamuno

William Chislett

Senior Research Fellow Associate at the Elcano Royal Institute | @WilliamChislett3

Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) would seem an odd choice for an essay by Arturo Barea (1897-1957), best known for his autobiographical trilogy *The Forging of a Rebel*, first published in the UK in the 1940s after Barea arrived there in exile after the Civil War. When the War started in 1936, Barea, the son of a washerwoman and self-educated (he left school at 13), supported the Republican cause. Unamuno, the 72-year-old philosopher and professor of Greek at the University of Salamanca, backed Franco's uprising, and, as a result, was sacked as Rector of the University by the Republican



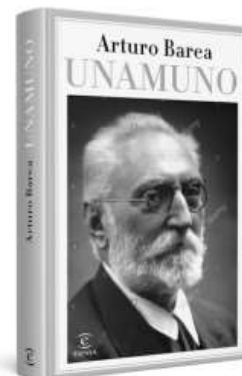
government. Franco reinstated him, but then got rid of him again after Unamuno's famous confrontation with General José Millán Astray on 12 October 1936 in the university's auditorium. In response to Millán Astray shouting "¡Muera la inteligencia!", Unamuno replied "Venceréis, pero no convenceréis"

When Barea was given the choice to write an essay on Unamuno or Ortega y Gasset, he did not hesitate to choose the former. By then the philosopher and novelist was viewed sympathetically among Spanish exiles for various reasons, including his period in exile (1924-1930 under the dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera) and his intellectual honesty. His *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* had been published in English in 1921, with an introduction by Salvador de

Madariaga, and Unamuno received honorary degrees from Oxford and Cambridge in 1936.

Barea's essay was published in England in 1952 and in Argentina in 1959, two years after his death. It has now, in May 2020, finally been published for the first time in Spain, with my preface.

Barea regarded Unamuno's struggle for a 'new' Spain as more honest and democratic than that of Ortega y Gasset, who theorised that the country could be saved by the intellectual elites. Barea felt attracted to Unamuno. In his earlier essay *Lorca: el poeta y su pueblo*, published in 1944, Barea wrote "*La tragedia de Unamuno era que tenía que protestar contra tener que morir, a sabiendas de que la aniquilación de su existencia llegaría implacablemente.*"



Barea's wife Ilsa also had a connection with Unamuno as she had translated for Cyril Connolly's prestigious magazine *Horizon* in 1941 the account by the also exiled Luis Portillo (father of Michael) on the confrontation with Millán Astray, although Portillo did not witness it. That version was taken by generations of Spaniards as definitive – and used by Hugh Thomas in the first edition of his ground-

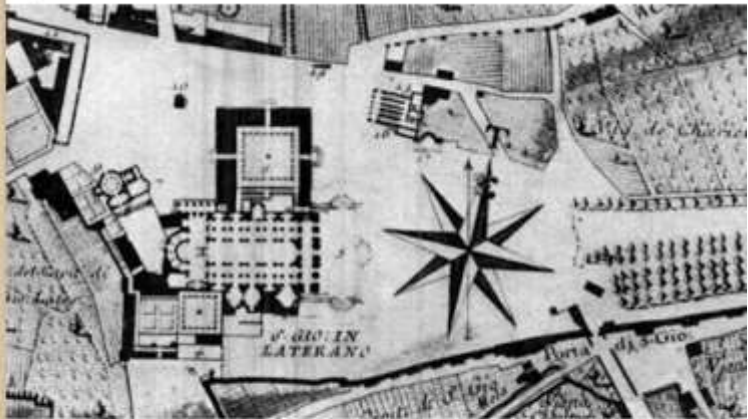
breaking book on the Civil War first published in 1961 – and has since been disproved as not exactly how it happened.

In little more than 100 pages, Barea covers for the general public the philosophic and religious dimension of Unamuno, the "*problema nacional*" (the conflict between Spanish tradition and the opening toward Europe), his tragic sense of life and his ambition as a poet. "*No hay español pensante que no haya sentido, voluntaria e involuntariamente, la influencia del pensamiento aguijoneante, estimulante, irritante y humiliante de Miguel de Unamuno,*" Barea concludes.

Unamuno by Arturo Barea (Espasa), €19.90.

<https://williamchislett.com/arturo-barea-archive/>

William Chislett curated the exhibition on Arturo Barea for the Instituto Cervantes in 2018.



‘La Muerte y la brújula’: a most Borgesian subversion of the detective genre

Etta Selim, Y13 pupil at Harris Westminster School (London)

Labyrinths and esoteric riddles

In many of Borges’ works, myriad false leads and tantalising hints are interwoven, crafting a sort of detective story that is further complicated by the network of labyrinths and esoteric riddles that criss-cross the narrative. In some stories deception is so key to the narrative that Borges tricks the reader into believing in an inverted reality; for example, in ‘La Forma de la Espada’, the anonymous saviour metamorphoses into Vincent Moon, as multiple layers of ambiguity serve to conceal this change. More noticeably, however, in ‘La muerte y la brújula’, it is the protagonist’s fixation with an ‘interesting’ explanation of a series of murders that obscures the true events of story, and it is this obsession that leads to his inevitable



entrapment in a labyrinth constructed by his nemesis. The relationship of these details to the wider detective genre is therefore doubly tricky. Does Borges conform to the conventions of the genre or does he subvert them utterly? A character in Michael Butor's novel *L'emploi du temps* encapsulates a key notion when he remarks that 'all detective fiction is based on two murders of which the first, committed by the murderer, is merely the occasion for the second, in which he is the victim of the pure and unpunishable murderer, the detective'[1]. In 'La Muerte y La Brújula' we see a fascinating inversion of this trope, as it is Lönnrot who becomes the victim of the criminal Scharlach, and is duped into following an utterly false conception of the crimes. This key subversion rather suggests that Borges applies the trusted tools of the genre, *in order to* subvert its primary concerns.

Subversion and obfuscation



In the first place, Borges subverts the detective genre by creating a riveting veneer of Christian and Jewish esotericism that overlays the narrative, obfuscating – and eventually being supplanted by – *puramente rabínica, no los imaginarios percances de un imaginario ladrón*, and the latter '[le] interesa la captura del hombre que apuñaló a este desconocido'. Even within these descriptions, Borges already plants the seeds of the complete overthrow of Lönnrot's description, as the '*imaginarios percances de un imaginario ladrón*' that he scornfully disregards might more easily be read as a thickly ironic hypallage; it is Lönnrot himself who has been imagining a completely fictitious account of the murders.

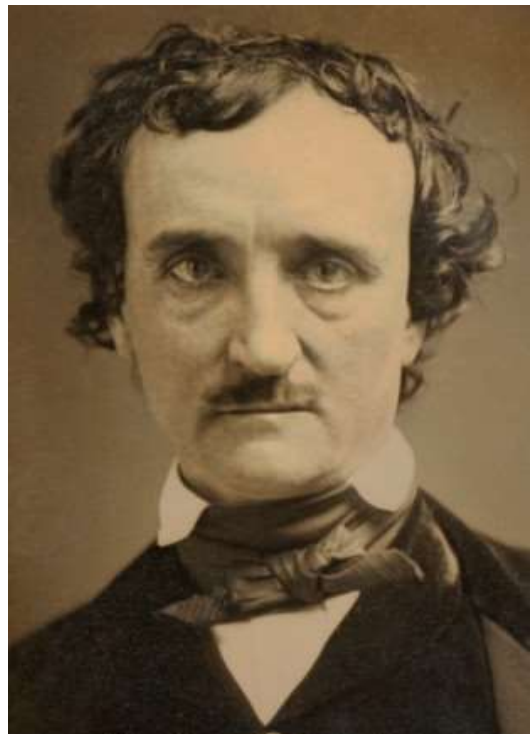
Overturning the banal concerns of the whodunnit



Yet perhaps the most important reason why this becomes a subversion of the detective genre is the fact that Lönnrot himself – as well as the reader – is duped into believing the first, theological (rabbinical) explanation, a narrative deception that is two-fold. The very presence of this story in the Borgesian *oeuvre* is a sure sign, for

seasoned Borges readers, that the banal concerns of a ‘whodunnit’ are about to be overturned, that the explanation truly lies in ‘un triángulo anónimo y en una polvorienta palabra griega’. These layers of imagery are made all the more convincing – and misleading – as elements of a detective story, by Lönnrot himself.

Borges writes about him that ‘se creía un puro razonador, un Auguste Dupin’, a confident assertion and intertextual reference that leads us to trust the naïve protagonist as one would trust Auguste Dupin’s searing intellect and reason, Dupin being the protagonist of ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ by Edgar Allen Poe, arguably the first modern detective story with Dupin as the prototypical astute detective and a precursor of Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot and so on. But even this trust is undermined, upon further analysis, by the typically Borgesian uncertainty of ‘se creía’: Lönnrot might believe himself a pure reasoner, but he is, in fact, far from being one. Nonetheless, we are unwittingly duped into disregarding Treviranus’ explanation, as well as his apt warning ‘no hay que buscarle tres pies al gato’ – made doubly ironic by the threes and fours that pepper the narrative in mockery of Lönnrot’s mistakes. This, if nothing else, constitutes the genius of this story as a subversion of the detective genre; the usually unequivocal authority of the protagonist, above that of a blundering police officer, melts away into nothing, as both his and the reader’s understanding of the murders turn out to be utterly false.



The inverted final showdown between Lönnrot and Red Scharlach



The final – and, I would argue, most vital – subversion of the detective genre becomes apparent only at the end of the story, when Scharlach reveals that he was the mastermind behind the murders, which were nothing more than an elaborate trap to capture Lönnrot. It is here that the established framework of a detective story becomes markedly

inverted. Instead of the typical “Poirot-esque” or “Sherlockholmsian” final confrontation, in which the triumphant reasoner accuses the murderer and launches into a minute explanation of their methods, it is Scharlach ‘who analyzes the detective’s modus operandi, lays a trap for him and, ultimately, reveals the true explanation of the events which have transpired’.^[1] The story even ends with the criminal’s final victory: ‘retrocedió unos pasos’ and ‘muy cuidadosamente, hizo fuego’. This series of staccato remarks create a cinematic montage of Lönnrot’s final moments. Of course, this finality is questioned when Lönnrot suggests that next time Scharlach should attempt to kill him in Zeno’s paradox – ‘un laberinto griego [en que] se han perdido tantos filósofos que bien puede perderse un mero detective’ – hinting at a future encounter in the style of ‘El encuentro’. The possibility of a future confrontation between these arch-nemeses does mirror the Holmes-Moriarty dynamic typical of the detective genre. However, Scharlach’s victory ends both the story and Lönnrot’s life, ultimately inverting the typical resolution of a detective story.

An elaborate red herring

In conclusion, Borges creates a subversion of the detective genre so clever, that deception pervades every aspect of the story until the end, leaving us as ignorant as Lönnrot. Ironically, the series of murders is the most intellectually stimulating adventure of Lönnrot’s career as a detective, as well as an elaborate ‘red herring’ and the cause of his death. Yet, just as Scharlach reigns supreme over Lönnrot’s interpretation and his own revenge, so too does Borges preside over the crimes of the story. His skilful manipulation of labyrinths, detectives and villains all allow him to become the ultimate mastermind of his own stories, wielding his own reputation as an



author with a penchant for the esoteric to trick the reader into an ironically false sense of security in the Borgesian symbols of eternity and intertextuality. Perhaps this is one of the most enticing aspects of Borges' literary corpus. All of his stories are filled with ripples of the detective story, creating currents of uncanny similarity, yet each manages to distort the detective genre a little differently, each ending becoming impossible to pinpoint.

[1] Quoted in Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p.44

[2] David A. Boruchoff, "In Pursuit of the detective genre: 'La muerte y la brújula' of J. L. Borges" *INTI*, no. 21, 1985, pp. 13–26. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/23284900 . Accessed 6 Feb. 2020.



Morality in *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*

Harry McKenzie, Year 12, Eton College

Crónica de una muerte anunciada, a novella written by Gabriel García Márquez and published in 1981, tells the story of the murder of Santiago Nasar. Márquez uses a non-linear narrative to create a sense of foreboding throughout. We learnt that Santiago Nasar will be murdered in the first line of the book, however, before Márquez presents a graphic murder scene to us, he first recounts the events that preceded Santiago's death. A rich but mysterious bachelor named Bayardo San Román comes to the town in search of a wife. He sets his sights on Angela Vicario and attempts to win her love through extravagant displays of his affection such as buying the most desirable house in the village for a large sum of money. She is pressured by her poor family to marry him and thus a lavish wedding takes place. The whole town attends and naturally, mass intoxication ensues. Amidst the revelry, Bayardo secretly returns Angela Vicario to her parents as he finds out that she is not a virgin and no longer wishes to marry her. Angela's mother beats her and demands the name of the man who took her virginity. Angela tells her family that it was Santiago Nasar. To restore their family's honour, Angela's brothers, Pedro and Pablo Vicario take butchers knives and set out to kill Santiago. They make no secret of their plans, and soon the whole town is aware of the forthcoming murder, except Santiago. Although many



people try to warn Santiago, he only finds out that he is in danger at the last minute, and the twin brothers murder him in a barbaric way, stabbing him over twenty times in front of his house.

Márquez details the idea of collective responsibility in *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*. Although Pedro and Pablo Vicario were the ones who stabbed Santiago Nasar, the whole town was responsible for his murder. Through cruel twists of fate, confusion and irresponsibility, not one of the hundreds of people who knew of the Vicarios' intent to assassinate Santiago prevented the crime from taking place. Even the town's policeman, Colonel Lázaro Aponte, made little attempt to prevent the killing and claimed that the twins were merely "puras bravuconadas". Most of the townspeople neither wanted to see Santiago dead nor cared enough about him to prevent the murder. It seems to me that Márquez is highlighting their complicit nature and telling us that even people who might be perceived as 'good' for warning a policeman, or passing on the message to someone who may encounter Santiago, are equally guilty.



Márquez questions our sense of morality by contrasting our understanding that murder is wrong with the town's acceptance that the only way to restore honour is to avenge a wrongdoing with murder. We might think that few people would question that murder is wrong, however, the town in which the story takes place is eerily reminiscent of those in Lorca's *Rural Tragedies* in the sense that honour must be maintained, no

matter the cost. In *Bodas de sangre*, the Novio sets out to kill Leonardo after he is humiliated by his fiancée abandoning him, whilst in *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* the Vicarios are compelled to kill Santiago even though they don't want to. Clotilde Armenta senses this and notes that "los hermanos Vicario no estaban tan ansiosos por cumplir la sentencia como por encontrar a alguien que les hiciera el favor de impedirselo." Therefore, the maintenance of honour isn't an individual choice, it's a duty bestowed on all the characters by the society that they live in.

Even the many people not involved in the crime uphold the importance of honour, with the pretext that "los asuntos de honor son estancos sagrados a los cuales sólo tienen acceso los dueños del drama." This is shown in the town's ignorant belief that "Sólo hubo una víctima: Bayardo San Román." By ignoring the trauma that Angela Vicario faced and the death of Santiago, the town directs all its sympathy to Bayardo San Román as the victim of Angela's dishonour.



Perhaps most importantly, the maintenance of honour is conjoined with the image of masculinity. Prudencia Cotes, Pablo Vicario's fiancée, tells the narrator "Yo sabía en qué andaba, y no sólo estaba de acuerdo, sino que nunca me hubiera casado con él si no cumplía como hombre." Consequently, the Vicarios believe that they would be emasculated if they did not kill Santiago, and there is no greater punishment than that.

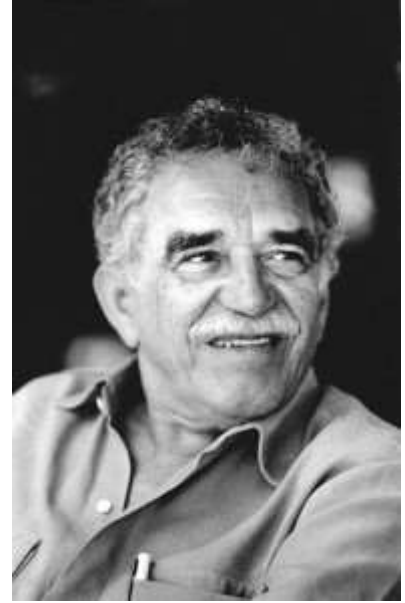
They are intoxicated, trapped in a tunnel that only opens up when they avenge their sister's humiliation. They are so immersed in their crime that they fail to hear "los gritos del pueblo entero espantado de su propio crimen."

Interestingly, Márquez creates dissonance within our feelings towards Santiago Nasar. Although the narrator often speaks positively of Santiago and we naturally pity his early death, we learn of Santiago's flaws as a character. Primarily, we find cause to dislike him for his sense of entitlement and sexual assault of Divina Flor, his young maid. Santiago gropes her and tells her that "Ya estás en tiempo de desbravar." This perhaps encourages the audience to empathise with the town's values and believe that Santiago was at least somewhat deserving of his death. Furthermore, Polo Carrillo, the owner of the electric plant, highlights Santiago's arrogance: "Creía que su plata lo hacía intocable".

This begs the question: did Santiago's wrongdoings justify his murder? Perhaps his death prevented the future rape of Divina Flor, and rid the town of a malicious and cruel man. However, ultimately Márquez reveals that Santiago did not deserve to die. Although the Vicarios stabbed him more than twenty times, "No había una gota de sangre". This highlights the unjust nature of the crime and shows an almost unbelievable purity to Nasar. It symbolically demonstrates his innocence, leading us to believe that he never slept with Angela Vicario.

Márquez drew inspiration for *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* from a real crime that took place in Sucre, Colombia, in 1951. A man named Cayetano Gentile was killed by the brothers of Margarita Chica, who was returned on her wedding night by her husband as she was not a virgin and thus, in his eyes, damaged goods. Gentile, her lover, was murdered in the main square of Sucre with the whole town looking on.

Márquez made key changes to the Gentile story. Firstly, his narrator is haunted by the injustice of Nasar's death, given that, unlike the Gentile case, the evidence that Nasar was truly responsible for deflowering Angela is tenuous. Further, in Márquez's version, Bayardo San Román eventually returns to Angela, who has since fallen in love with him. Their reconciliation may be taken as a comment on the absurdity of the honour code that led to his initial rejection of her. By changing these crucial elements of the Gentile story, Márquez is showing his disdain for a moral code that treats "los asuntos de honor" as "estancos sagrados".





Memes and Mafalda

Nathanial Gardner
University of Glasgow

If you have spent much time on social media in the past few weeks, you have probably encountered many different memes that try to find the lighter side of our battle with COVID19. Perhaps as language students you might have also noticed that the idea of what is funny and even the source material for humour can vary from place to place. Of course, there is universal comedy: Charlie Chaplin and Mr Bean have proven that certain comedy can successfully travel the world and delight the lives of many, crossing cultures and continents with great ease. However, as we think about the culture of Spanish-speaking world, it is worth considering what type of comedy has thrived over the years and has even been recycled in new ways during our current times.



Sometimes something very local has wide acceptance. As someone who has lived in Mexico, I never cease to be amazed at just how many other Spanish-speakers from different countries have come to know and love the famous children's TV programme *El chavo del ocho*. Full of Mexican terminology (many a person has asked me what a *torta de jamón* is – it's a ham sandwich – or what *tacos* taste like), it makes direct reference to what Mexican children know and love. However, its now iconic characters have been made into COVID19 memes and short videos that poke fun at our times – for example, one of the main characters, Don Ramón, going a bit crazy at home to send up how we tend to pass our time during quarantine. My favourite, however, is simply one of Don Ramón looking at himself in the mirror and seeing himself as a goner (his reflection is a skull). The captions give us the current context “*Tú llegando a casa después de que un señor estornudó a tu lado*/Arriving home after a man sneezes next to you”, underlines just exactly how a different text can give a new lease of life to a image or series of images.



If you briefly study the Latin American memes from our recent times, you might notice certain patterns emerge. They poke fun at the origins of the virus. They underscore the inability of governments to control the pandemic. They criticise themselves and their



neighbours with a self-deprecating humour that mirrors British humour. We can also observe how Latin America is affected and influenced by the rest of the world. Like the Argentine comic Mafalda, whose young characters would discuss and dance to the music of The Beatles with their friends (and could never understand how one of the other characters didn't like it) as it became part of our shared global history, the new memes

also show how the global finds reference in the local situations. Sometimes the humour is local, at other times more universal.

While many Mafalda topics became leitmotifs within the world that its author Quino created, two Mafaldian topics spring forth and are relevant to Latin American memes on our recent times. One is the reoccurrence of soup, the meal Mafalda hated the most and which, according to the cartoonist, represented the undesirable things in life that are forced upon us (just like a virus, quarantine, social distancing, and so forth). The other is Mafalda's continued concern with a globe that acts as a kind of metaphor for the real world in which we live. She would listen to it with a stethoscope, take its temperature, bandage it up when she thought it was unwell, or simply tell us to be quiet because it needed a rest. It was an excellent and effective way of using wit and child-like innocence to offer important social commentary, as often occurs with humour. Though firmly rooted in Argentina, and now more than half a century old, this humour makes levity and causes us to take pause – features also present in the memes of our times. These comics and memes show that the Spanish-speaking world reflects about its role in the world, cares for it, and laughs at it as well.





Culture vultures: a ‘stay at home’ pandemic quiz

With coronavirus the de facto guest editor of this edition, we offer below a quiz based on memorable references to disease in Spanish-language film and literature. See how many you and your socially distanced *compañeros* can identify. All except the last question are from authors/works featured in past and present Pre-U syllabuses.

Perhaps the hardest question first:

1. What illness-related event in García Márquez’s *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* leads a secondary character to commit a decisive *error mortal*?
2. García Márquez’s most famous work pre-empted the medical discovery of collective semantic dementia: what were the two main symptoms for the residents of Macondo?
3. Which García Márquez novel’s opening paragraph describes the protagonist potentially becoming infected, and with what deadly disease?

4. In which of García Márquez's novels does Dr Juvenal Urbino win high esteem for his ability to tackle the disease ravaging his city? Name one of the real cities on which the city of the novel is based.
5. Film question: the terminal illness of an elderly *indígena* woman is arguably the turning point in this 'road movie' par excellence. What is the film, and in which country does this episode take place?
6. This Sabina song opens with the singer complaining about the eponymous protagonist's poor health. Name one of the medical conditions mentioned, and the title of the song.
7. "*Se deslizan confusiones. Lo traicionero es la memoria.*" In which novel does a major character first admit to symptoms of mental illness in these terms, and what is his job?
8. Why do the guests fall ill after eating the wedding cake, and in which novel?
9. In which Borges short story does the protagonist set out by train to convalesce in his *estancia*, after recovering from what life-threatening illness?
10. "*¿Qué será esto, xxxxx, que parece que se me ablandan los cascotes o se me derriten los sesos, o que sudo de los pies a la cabeza?*" To whom (xxxxxx) is this remark directed, and why is the speaker suffering the symptoms described?

Now check your answers [here](#).