

# ¡Bienvenidos!



Welcome to the autumn 2020 edition of the Bulletin: *un saludo solidario* in particular to our readers in schools and universities, to whom we dedicate Nathaniel Gardner's heartwarming story of [saving study abroad](#) from the pandemic.

Saving [tourism across the Spanish-speaking world](#) will be harder – we look at the data.



Saving the reputation of former king Juan Carlos is a different sort of challenge. In [Juan Carlos: the errant king](#) his biographer Professor Sir Paul Preston puts into context the latest dramatic twists in the former monarch's life story.

William Chislett is another distinguished Briton at home in Madrid's inner circles. In this (Spanish language) extract from his newly published [Microhistoria de España](#) he reflects on the changes he has seen in his adoptive country since the Transition.

2020 is adding new chapters to the history books, not least through the Black Lives Matter movement. We look at how [teaching Spanish film](#) can help develop

students' understanding of 'otherness', and at [myths of racial democracy in Cuba and Brazil](#).

Above all, 2020 is the year of the virus: [España al día](#) explains controversies relating to the Madrid lockdown against a turbulent political backdrop, while [Perú en pandemia](#) offers a citizen's-eye view of the situation in the world's worst affected country (both articles featuring some great pandemic-era Spanish for language students).



Also on a Peruvian theme, Stephen Hart looks at the nexus between [César Vallejo's](#) life story and his poetry, examined at Pre-U for the first time next year.

And we commemorate (in Spanish) [Carlos Ruiz Zafón](#), best-selling author of *La sombra del viento* / *The shadow of the wind*. The arrival of this edition marks the

publication of our [guidelines](#) to assist any potential contributors (especially students) in preparing drafts for submission.

The Bulletin remains a free resource by and for students, teachers, examiners and experts, with readers in every continent. Please pass it on and update us with new and additional addresses, for example if there have been staff changes at your institution or you know of others who might wish to be on our mailing list.

Submissions for the next edition should please reach us by the end of January.

Hasta la vacuna siempre,

The BAS editorial team

# España al día: pandemia, corrupción y otras elecciones catalanas



*By BAS editor Francisco Compan*

La crisis del coronavirus en España entra en un mes de octubre marcado por el cierre parcial de la Comunidad de Madrid que tiene uno de los peores datos de incidencia del virus de todo el país. En algunas partes de la comunidad hay incluso más de 500 casos positivos por cada 100.000 habitantes lo que ha llevado al gobierno central tomar el control y restringir la entrada y salida en, de momento, once municipios.

Desafortunadamente, el problema de la gestión de la pandemia en la región de la capital de España se ha visto agravado por las tensiones políticas entre el gobierno central y los líderes del gobierno autonómico de Madrid. La disputa entre ellos ha monopolizado prácticamente los titulares de prensa desde el verano. Y es que la decisión del gobierno central de ceder una parte de la gestión de la crisis a los gobiernos autonómicos al principio de la “desescalada”, derivó en el comienzo de una serie de acusaciones entre partidos políticos y una falta de cooperación entre ciertas comunidades.

Aunque la incidencia del virus haya estado en alerta roja desde agosto, según el Ministerio de Sanidad, la relativa independencia autonómica ha llevado a, en ocasiones, grandes diferencias en las medidas tomadas. El Principado de Asturias ha sido un ejemplo de buena gestión e impuso el uso de la mascarilla desde el principio del verano en zonas urbanas y en zonas rurales donde no se pudiera garantizar el distanciamiento social. Madrid, por el contrario, fue la última comunidad, exceptuando a Canarias, en imponer esta medida recomendada por la OMS. En cualquier caso, España ha identificado un número alarmante de contagios en esta segunda ola, en parte porque ha hecho una gran cantidad de pruebas PCR. En España, en contraste con otros países europeos como el Reino Unido, se hicieron pruebas a profesores antes del comienzo del curso escolar, y en general a cualquier persona que lo solicitara, con diferencias entre comunidades también. Ciertas regiones, como es el caso de Asturias, requieren que todos los pacientes se sometan a una PCR antes de cualquier cita médica.



el caso de las tarjetas *black*, y recientemente absuelto por el caso Bankia, ya no necesitará pasar más noches en prisión.

Por otra parte, el auge de la telemática, impulsado por la Covid, ha traspasado el entorno laboral y ha llegado al penitenciario, de lo que se beneficiará en gran medida el exvicepresidente del gobierno Rodrigo Rato. El Juzgado Central de Vigilancia Penitenciaria de la Audiencia Nacional ha acordado concederle el tercer grado bajo control telemático, por lo que el condenado por

Aunque las noticias estén casi monopolizadas por la pandemia, siempre nos quedará la Casa Real para darnos un descanso del virus. A los ya innumerables deslices del rey emérito, ahora huido a Emiratos Árabes Unidos, se suman otras acusaciones de corrupción que lo vincularían a la adjudicación ilegal de la construcción de la línea de tren de alta velocidad a la Meca. Mientras tanto, en España, Unidas Podemos ha advertido que una de las tareas fundamentales del



partido como socio de gobierno del PSOE es avanzar hacia un “horizonte republicano”. Pablo Iglesias, vicepresidente segundo, ha recalcado que el Jefe del Estado debería ser elegido por los ciudadanos y que éste debe responder ante la Justicia como todo el mundo. El ataque de Iglesias a la Corona se topó con un quizá inesperado defensor de Juan Carlos I, en la figura de Felipe González, antiguo presidente del Gobierno, quien destacó la dimensión histórica del rey emérito y su “fantástico servicio” a España.

En caso de que la crisis de la pandemia y los escándalos de la Casa Real no sean bastante para caldear el ambiente, el Tribunal Supremo, en un ataque de mano izquierda sin precedentes, léase sarcásticamente, ha confirmado la inhabilitación de Quim Torra como presidente de la Generalitat. El ya expresidente catalán



ha sido declarado culpable de un delito de desobediencia por incumplir la orden de la Junta Electoral Central de retirar, durante la campaña electoral, una pancarta de apoyo a los presos del *procès* del Palau de la Generalitat. Esta situación llevará a Cataluña a unas elecciones que sucederán, con mucha probabilidad, el 14 de febrero, día de San Valentín para más inri.

# El Perú en pandemia



*Cristina Díaz Dreier es una peruana que pasa la mitad del año en Ginebra (Suiza) y la otra mitad en Lima. En esta reflexión nos cuenta la experiencia de estar en el Perú durante este año de pandemia.*

Regresé a Lima el 9 de marzo de 2020. Al llegar al aeropuerto ya había todo un equipo de enfermeras y médicos. Muchos turistas no querían acatar las instrucciones del personal sanitario y los peruanos que llegaban se veían desorientados. El personal sanitario tomaba la temperatura, ofrecía gel desinfectante y pedía que se respetara el distanciamiento social, pero se reunieron cuatro vuelos provenientes de diferentes países europeos y era imposible pedir



distanciamiento social y cumplir con todos los protocolos. No obstante, el personal de servicio fue muy amable y sereno a pesar del ambiente algo alterado. Si era necesario, dirigían a personas posiblemente contaminadas a una posta médica en el mismo aeropuerto.

Al menos por los alrededores de donde yo vivo en Lima se adaptó rápidamente a la pandemia. Al principio era algo atemorizante, pero se implementaron buena

higiene y distanciamiento social. El estado tomó medidas estrictas desde el primer caso, sin embargo, la gente irresponsable podía ser un problema.

Se implementaron medidas para frenar la pandemia, pero la población contaminada fue siempre mayor que los recursos ofrecidos. Ha faltado mucha organización. En zonas alejadas de la capital ha habido escasez de medicamentos, oxígeno y espacio en hospitales. Bien que la ejemplaridad, sacrificio y devoción de muchos médicos, enfermero(a)s y ejército en general han sido de un nivel asombroso. Muchos han sido héroes y han ofrecido sus vidas por los demás.



El alto ranking del Perú en la lista de países peor afectados del mundo se debe a varios factores. Por ejemplo, el sector más pobre no puede resistir económicamente una cuarentena: trabajan como si no existiera un virus – aunque sea ilegalmente por las leyes de prohibición. El ingreso básico, que es para muchos algo bajo, no permite a muchas familias gastar en algo adicional como mascarillas y desinfectantes. Muchas personas son el único ingreso de una familia numerosa y son jornaleros: tienen solo un ingreso diario. Si no salen a trabajar todos los días, no disponen del mínimo para sobrevivir. Además, el transporte público, que la mayoría de personas que laboran lo utiliza, estaba siempre muy solicitado – había más pasajeros que transporte. Esta fue una razón por la que había aglomeración en los buses y por ende más posibilidad de contaminación. Por supuesto, como en todos los países contaminados, con el traspaso del tiempo hubo algo de relajó y eso no está bien.

Se ha incrementado mucho el desempleo. Por supuesto, ha habido injerencias de algunas compañías extranjeras y sobre todo del gobierno chino, que han tratado de aprovecharse de esta situación. Muchos peruanos consideramos un deshonor que un país donde se ha sufrido tanto de hambruna y de limitaciones de toda índole en estos momentos no actúe con corrección.



Las fronteras del país han estado cerradas durante gran parte del año. Cuando regresen los turistas creo que cada viajero deberá ser consciente de que es responsable de su propia persona. Debe tener contactos en el país visitado y en el país de origen, en caso de alguna urgencia, y claro

no participar en reuniones sociales. Tener siempre los teléfonos necesarios a la mano. Llevar los artículos de higiene y desinfección necesarios. No viajar con lo mínimo, evitar ir a lugares muy alejados o poco solicitados, así se puede recibir una ayuda inmediata. La espiritualidad en muchas situaciones ayuda.



# Sun, sea and virus: el turismo in trouble



*Compiled by BAS editor Robin Wallis*

There is no shortage of online metrics to illustrate the pummelling that the Spanish-speaking world has taken from the pandemic. Canning House has been a particularly insightful source, with its regular webinars on all things Latin American.



Before looking at the tourism impact, a brief overview of the bigger picture in the region.

Between June and September, 43% of global Covid-19 deaths occurred in Latin America. By proportion of population, the world's twelve worst affected countries included six from Latin America (the order was Peru, Belgium, Andorra, Spain, the UK, Chile, Brazil, Italy, the US, Sweden, Mexico, Panama and Bolivia). Endemic vulnerabilities worsen the situation, such as the number of families having to queue for water at public stands in the shantytowns or depending on a daily wage to buy food. Education has been disrupted and investment is down. Per capita GDP is likely to be set back ten years.



Globally, tourism accounts for one tenth of GDP and one tenth of employment (330 million jobs). In Latin America in 2019 it generated almost 300 billion dollars and 17 million jobs. It's estimated that, if the recovery starts in 2021, it will take until 2025 to return to these levels.

In Spain, Covid-19 and its associated travel restrictions meant that in August (usually

the peak month of the season, but this year no better than July) fewer than 2.5 million tourists arrived, compared to over 10 million in August 2019 – a decline of 76%. Only a quarter of a million UK visitors went to Spain in August this year – two million less than in August 2019. The 2020 total number of arrivals to the end of August amounted to 15 million, as against 58 million for the same period in 2019. Spain's travel sector is crying out for a hefty share of the EU reconstruction packages.

Passenger confidence is the key element of a recovery and fluctuates with each new headline and government pronouncement. Over the summer potential European passengers were more comfortable about flying within Europe than long-haul. Unpredictable border closures and the quarantine 'roulette' have been a nightmare for airlines. The lack of an international standard testing regime added to the gloom. Air Europa, for example, which flew to 23 Latin American destinations before the pandemic, in July 2020 resumed a reduced service to Sao Paulo and Havana only, with the possibility of returning this year to Buenos Aires and Bogotá.



Holiday insurance is another key factor. The Canary Islands and the Dominican Republic are two popular destinations where the authorities issued some sort of health guarantee for visitors, the latter putting in place a comprehensive state-funded travel assistance package extending until December. However, health

problems cut both ways: tourists bring virus spikes, as holiday spots like Trinidad and the Bahamas have recently found out.

The silver lining? Ninety percent of passengers are determined to resume travelling as soon as the pandemic abates (ie post-vaccination). 'Travel always bounces back stronger from a crisis,' says Colin Stewart of the Latin America Travel Group.



One positive effect of the hiatus is that it gives areas suffering from over-tourism (in the Spanish context, Barcelona and Mallorca in particular) the chance to modify their offer during the rebuilding phase. Another positive has been the opportunity for innovation, such as 'workcations' or even 'schoolcations' offered by some Mexican resorts,

allowing office workers and students the chance to stay connected online while enjoying the benefits of being in a holiday resort rather than an urban lockdown back home. Complementary to this is the creation of a 'golden visa' in Costa Rica, allowing online workers to stay for a full year. Such innovations have tended to boost villa rentals rather than the hotel sector of the holiday market and have encouraged the provision of new services such as bicycle hire and food delivery.

The Bulletin would appreciate hearing first-hand travel stories from any readers who live in the Spanish-speaking world or are travelling through it during the forthcoming half-term or end of year holidays.

*\*For over 75 years, Canning House's Mission has been to build understanding and relationships between the UK, Latin America & Iberia. It is the UK's leading forum for contacts, thought-leadership and pragmatic debate on Latin American political, economic and social trends and issues, and business risks and opportunities.*

Learn more about Canning House and its programme of upcoming events by visiting [www.canninghouse.org](http://www.canninghouse.org)

## Juan Carlos: errant but still admired



At the beginning of August this year Spaniards were astonished by the sudden departure into exile of their once revered former king, Juan Carlos.

Three weeks later the BBC Radio 4 programme *Crossing Continents* broadcast an interview with Juan Carlos' former lover Corinna zu Sayn-Wittgenstein. The programme focused on the then king's ill-fated Botswana hunting trip in 2012 and more recent allegations of financial impropriety.

Juan Carlos' biographer and Professor of International History at the LSE Sir Paul Preston contributed to that programme, and in late September spoke to the *Bulletin of Advanced Spanish* about the errant former monarch.

**BAS:** *Your 2004 biography Juan Carlos: a people's king (and the updated Spanish version of 2012) are striking for the empathy you bring to the portrayal of Juan Carlos. Do you feel the same empathy for him now?*

**PP:** Yes. I feel sorry for what he went through. As a boy he was constantly moved between homes in different countries. By the time the family settled in Portugal he was 10 and it was deemed his duty to go to Spain to be educated as Franco saw fit. That led to a pretty awful childhood and adolescence.

My first proper meeting with him was not long after the book came out. I assumed I'd been summoned to the palace to have my head chopped off. But instead, Juan



Carlos said, 'You've given me back my childhood. Everything else written about me dwells on the privileges of being royal, but you've captured what I really went through.' It was moving to hear that. Fifty years from now I think Juan Carlos will be remembered for the great achievements of the Transition. The current difficulties will be a footnote.

**BAS:** *You reflect in the biography that Juan Carlos 'could legitimately look back over his life and reflect that he deserved some reward for the sacrifices made'. Can we take it that Juan Carlos shared this view – and that it may explain some of what has gone wrong?*

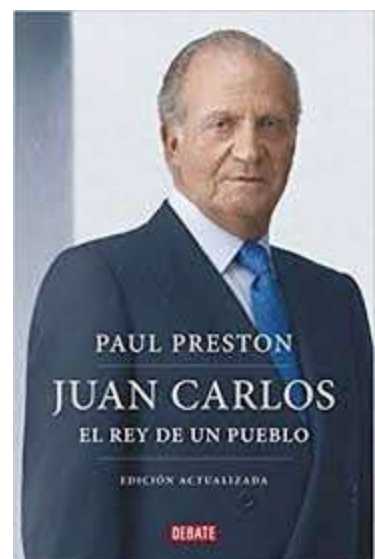


**PP:** I've never put it to him directly, but yes – I think that is the case. Juan Carlos sacrificed a lot and had to take risks. After 1982 his role as the 'fireman of democracy' was no longer needed. His role as a neutral head of state remained crucial, but he increasingly became Spain's chief commercial ambassador. Unfortunately, that led to him mixing with some dubious characters.

**BAS:** *That's when he lost the 'abnegation and sense of duty' to which the biography refers?*

**PP:** In the 2012 edition I refer to it as *el descanso del guerrero* – the warrior's repose. There's a parallel with our own Edward VII. Psychologists recognise that people who think of themselves as having had a deprived childhood develop addictive needs as adults. Juan Carlos was born in exile and his family was poor compared to other European monarchies. Money was a sensitive issue for him.

In later life, on trade missions to the Middle East, he found himself alongside rulers who not only enjoyed mind-boggling wealth, but also valued the principle of solidarity among monarchs. There are stories of him visiting the Gulf and mentioning that he was a bit short, whereupon a major gift would appear. With people around him saying, 'you deserve this, Spaniards owe you everything,' it must have been very tempting, and he



may have lost his moral compass. After a lifetime of sacrifice, with all this wealth available, he may have thought, 'sod it, now it's my turn'.

Bear in mind, though, that the specific claims concern a commission supposedly paid for the Medina-Mecca railway by the Saudi government. Why on earth would the Saudi government have paid the commission? In corruption cases of this sort it's the contractor who bribes the host government official, not the host government bribing an intermediary. What makes it even odder is that the 'gift' was paid in 2008, but the contract not signed until 2011. So these remain unproven allegations rather than revelations.

**BAS:** *The Spanish news media of the late 20th / early 21st century were gratingly obsequious to the royal family. Did this generate an atmosphere of impunity that might have affected Juan Carlos?*

**PP:** Yes. You would need extreme strength of character not to be affected by that sort of adulation. There was a set of unspoken rules about what the press could say, the tone they had to take. It was pretty slavishly adhered to until the start of this century, eroding only slightly in the decade up to 2010 (and even then the journalists who did reveal things were frowned upon). The whole thing went to hell in a bucket with the 2012 elephant scandal.

**BAS:** *Should we be feeling sorry for Queen Sofia? She has in her turn endured a degree of solitude and abandonment.*

**PP:** Sofia is a serious and intelligent woman who was absolutely crucial for her inputs at key moments. When they were first together, they were in love – it wasn't an arranged marriage – and it remained a pretty good relationship for two or three decades. During that time, he had lots of bits on the side, I'm pretty sure. In the history of the Borbón monarchs, it's in the DNA. So it's very likely that the philandering was the cause of the break-up.

**BAS:** *And the break-up left him more vulnerable to other influences than if they'd stayed together?*

**PP:** Yes, that's plausible.

**BAS:** *In describing Juan Carlos' early tours around Spain in the 1960s, you quote him as saying that he found 'no widespread monarchical spirit' in the country. With*

*opinion polls now suggesting that public support for the monarchy is waning, do you think that's still the case?*

**PP:** Under the dictatorship there were sections of the army and the aristocracy that supported Franco in the mistaken belief that he intended to restore the monarchy. However, he didn't do so: instead, he created a new monarchy. To use the Spanish phrase, *no hubo una restauración, hubo una instauración*.

When Franco died in 1975 Juan Carlos had only the most tenuous right to be on the throne, having been nominated as Franco's successor through the 1947 *Ley de Sucesión*. Franco broke the royal line of succession: Juan Carlos' father Don Juan was the legitimate heir to the throne, but Franco effectively induced Juan Carlos to betray his father. Juan Carlos was persuaded that his father was



never going to become king, and realised that the only way to get his family back on the throne was to become king himself. Juan Carlos' appointment of Suárez as prime minister and the ensuing reforms of the late 1970s built confidence in the monarchy. In 1977, when Don Juan renounced his claim to the throne, Juan Carlos became the legitimate heir rather than just Franco's nominee. *Juancarlismo* became the monarchy's greatest asset, enabling Juan Carlos to extinguish *golpismo* and put down the 1981 coup attempt.

**BAS:** *Do you think that Felipe and Leticia are committed to perpetuating the monarchy, or would they be ready to accept a referendum on it?*

**PP:** If you're actually a member of a royal family, there seems to be a notion that your first duty is not to the country, but to the dynasty – keeping your family on the throne. This became an obsession for Don Juan, and later for Juan Carlos himself. Felipe and Leticia are certainly committed to perpetuating the monarchy. And Felipe has been at pains to insulate the Crown from the allegations involving his sister and father. It may even be the case that the decision to go into exile was not made by Juan Carlos.



The question of a referendum is immensely complex. The Constitution is based on a monarchy. It's not impossible that a party campaigning on a 'monarchy or republic' referendum could win an election by a big enough majority to change the Constitution, but it would be a very difficult process. If those circumstances came about, Felipe would have

little choice but to accept both the referendum and its result. We're into futurology here.... I've no idea if it will happen, or if it happened what the result would be. However, given how conflictive Spanish politics are... can you imagine who would be president of the third republic? The possibilities for conflict are endless.

That said, Felipe stirred trouble with his address after the Catalonia referendum in 2017. I couldn't believe it. It was hardline centralism, pure Rajoy-speak. I can understand that a king doesn't want to see his country broken up, but there has to be a degree of give and take – some nod to finding a negotiated way out.

**BAS:** *The Spanish have memorable cognomens for many of their monarchs: Sancho el Gordo, Ordoño el Malo, Felipe el Hermoso, Juana la Loca... Have you ever considered what Juan Carlos' might be?*

**PP:** I've just published a history of corruption in Spain, going back to the stereotypes of Spaniards in past centuries, as far back as the picaresque, and it's striking how people who are considered sharp – able to get money and women by whatever means – are admired, at least by men. So I'd suggest Juan Carlos el Listo: a term that his admirers can interpret as 'clever' or 'intelligent'. His detractors may read into it something closer to 'wily' or 'deceptive'.

**BAS:** *Might there be a revised edition of your Juan Carlos biography?*

**PP:** Yes, if my publisher were to ask. Until then, I'm keeping busy dismantling the library of the LSE's Cañada Blanch Centre [for Contemporary Spanish Studies] – finding homes for 9,000 books on contemporary Spain and the Spanish Civil War before it closes at the end of the year. Most will go to the main LSE library, but it's

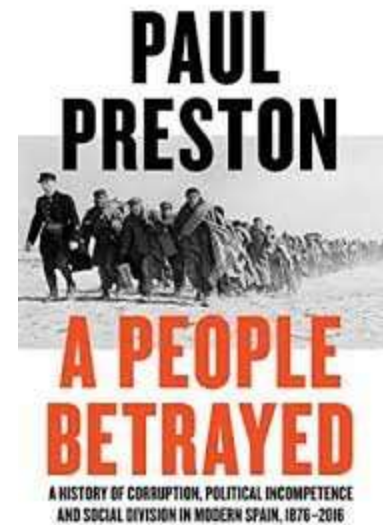


still rather heart-breaking to split up a collection acquired over 26 years. There'll still be a Cañada Blanch programme at the LSE, but focused on *la actualidad* rather than my period of history.

*Sir Paul was speaking to BAS senior editor Robin Wallis.*

*Sir Paul has published widely on the Spanish Civil War, the Franco regime and its atrocities, the transition to democracy, and, most recently, A People Betrayed: A History of Corruption, Political Incompetence and Social Division in Modern Spain 1874-2018 (London: William Collins, 2020).*

*Juan Carlos: a people's king (HarperCollins) was published in 2004, and updated in Spanish as Juan Carlos: el rey de un pueblo (Editorial Debate 2012). Copies were routinely presented to Juan Carlos' official visitors during the last decade of his reign.*



# Study Abroad versus the virus



*By BAS editor Nathaniel Gardner*

“Is study abroad a part of the Spanish degree?” Yes!

Having worked at the University of Glasgow for several years now, I can testify that this is one of the most frequent questions that prospective students ask on Open Days. It is quickly followed up by two more questions: “Where are your exchange programmes?” and “How long can I stay abroad?”



I worked overseas before my degree, so the time I spent abroad during it was an additional plus, an added perk. As a teacher I came to understand just how much students actually longed to undertake residence abroad as an integral part of their degree.

Most will agree that it is one of the most treasured parts of their experience as students of modern languages.

When I was asked to oversee the year abroad for Glasgow students, I became acutely aware of just how much time and energy they invest in the experience, choosing the programme (work or study) and its location (of the many we can choose from as Spanish speakers and learners). It brought home to me how spoiled we are for choice when it comes to destinations. Some languages only have one or two countries where they can undertake study abroad. Spanish truly is a world language.

The knowledge acquired during a study abroad stay is irreplaceable and irreplicable. Just as no amount of book study will replace the knowledge the medical student learns in his or her time in residency in a medical centre, no amount of internet study will replace life lived abroad.



What is it that we learn there? What is that impossible to bring into the classroom?

I think it has to do with the way that study abroad turns the world into our classroom. When we arrive in the new country, we become citizens born again. Linguistic skills are not the only ones we acquire. For example, our empathy is honed during this time away.

What student is not able to show more patience for the foreigner who is struggling to make him or herself understood after they have lived though that same experience? Who has not learned to simplify what they write so it can be read with greater ease or clarity after struggling

to comprehend some byzantine instructions written in another language?

During the year abroad we give some part (maybe even a large part) of our heart to the country where we have resided. This is precisely because we have lived for a season on the other side of the fence. We have become the other. Living abroad expands our horizons, teaches us how large and small the world is at once and just how much we know and don't know. We become more effective communicators in our own language and in the one we are learning, and we learn to see our own country better. Our sense of global responsibility is enhanced.



All of these are essential lessons taken away from residence abroad. This is not hidden knowledge, but it is only truly accessible by experience.

When the Foreign and Commonwealth Office began to restrict travel to foreign countries due to Covid-19, it was no surprise

that many students were concerned that the pandemic would prevent them from completing their year abroad. Emails flooded my inbox with despair and worry. At the University of Glasgow we kept a close eye on the situation and drew up contingency plans. When in mid-summer many of the travel restrictions were lifted in the EU we sighed in relief (as did most of our students). The relief was short-lived: less than a month later Spain and several other countries were back on the 'essential travel only' list.

It was at this point that the benefits of the year abroad became even more relevant. What happens to a modern languages degree when you take study abroad out of



it? What is the essence that is extracted from the experience? That is when we reached the conclusion that residence abroad as part of a modern languages degree is essential, just as laboratory work is essential to the chemist, or hospital residency to the medic. What our

students learn from it is essential. We made our case and, thankfully, others agreed.

This of course is a simplified version of the events. A lot of groundwork had to be done to gain support for the ruling. However, building the case was beneficial for ourselves and for many students. We weren't the only university to do so either.

Thanks to this welcome decision a new generation of students can enjoy the lessons that can only be learnt far away.



# Teaching Spanish Film in the era of Black Lives Matter



*By BAS editor Helen Laurenson*

Almost from the inception of film in the early 20th century, cinema in Spanish has been at the vanguard of exploring societies in conflict, developing a tradition of oppositional defiance and creativity which highlights questions of identity, gender, politics and marginality.

From Luis Buñuel's revolutionary and caustic take on society in films such as *Un chien andalou* (1929), *Los olvidados* (1950) and *Viridiana* (1961), through



Berlanga's darkly comic critiques of Franco's Spain, *Bienvenida, Mister Marshall* (1953) and *El verdugo* (1963), it becomes clear that successive generations of film-makers have mined the rich seam of Spanish society, both through a variety of genres and cinematographic techniques.

The cultural and political similarities between Spain and Latin America have also engendered a complementary visual response to socio-historical events in that continent, with

Bunuel's Spanish-Mexican co-productions and more recently with collaborations between TVE, Almodóvar's El Deseo production company, ICAA, Tornasol, Telecinco and the Ministerio de Cultura de España. These co-productions have garnered not just critical acclaim – *El secreto de sus ojos* (2009), *Relatos salvajes* (2014) – but also mainstream success.

The study of cinema in British Hispanism has evolved considerably over the past thirty or so years, moving from a distinctly *auteur*-based approach to a more multimodal and theme-centred focus. These developments across the study of film in all languages at undergraduate level in British universities are, of course, important as regards the potential skill set of MFL graduates who choose teaching as a profession and who may be required to teach film at A level.

Film studies, fuelled by academic research and disseminated through undergraduate modules, was initially informed by an erudite and quasi-literary approach to film as text, and focused on the *oeuvre* of individual directors (Buñuel, Pasolini, Truffaut, for example). Films and directors were selected for their *culturally dignified art form* (Peter Wagstaff, *Italian Neorealist Cinema*), and belonged to the more *art house* tradition of cinema with a clear intellectual *caché*, as opposed to the more commercial Hollywood output during the same period.

In Hispanism, this was reflected in the excellent studies of Buñuel, Víctor Erice and Carlos Saura by Peter Evans and Gwynne Edwards, and of Almodóvar by Paul Julian Smith. Multiple books and articles were to emerge, written by a generation of enthusiastic academics including Gwynne Edwards, Chris Perriam, Isabel Santaolalla and Rob Stone.



However, it soon became clear that the study of film was as fluid and moveable as the genre itself. The pedagogy of film quickly lent itself to broader, more socio-cultural, historical and theoretical applications in both teaching and research. Indeed, from the mid-1990s it became evident that some of the most popular undergraduate courses in Modern Languages have been those focusing on visual production, in addition to more traditional textual study, such as 'The Supernatural in Latin American Literature and Film' at Manchester, or 'Is Spain

white? Nation, Immigration and Performance in Spain and Images of Women in Contemporary Spanish Cinema' at Leeds.

Academics soon realised that a sea-change had come about as regards not just the tastes of the undergraduates, but in their visual competences. It was, and continues to be, a small step to cineliteracy from students' already well-developed general visual literacy and sophisticated response to the moving image. It is this question that we now address as regards not just the broader embedding of cinema in the Modern Languages curricula in secondary and senior schools – with specific reference to Spanish and Latin America film – but to what extent film can make an essential contribution to interculturalism and tolerance in the light of Black Lives Matter (BLM).

With the expansion of postgraduate degree courses in Film Studies, it is not surprising that research has also focused on the way in which the study of film can be integrated into secondary school teaching. The BFI has been instrumental in pioneering the use of film to support both literacy and language learning with its 'Reframing Literacy' and 'Screening Languages' initiatives. The dual objectives are to refresh modern language subject knowledge and empower teachers with new pedagogical approaches.



As a curriculum development research project, Screening Languages was instrumental in providing a clear framework and research methodology for the teaching of Modern Languages through the moving image in schools. The use of teacher and pupil questionnaires, reflective teaching logs and observation encouraged an approach to Modern Languages' teaching which is both *film-rich* and *transformative*. This was

further supported by training options for PGCSE MFL students.

In 2014 the DfE KS3 & 4 Framework document described foreign language study as a 'liberation from insularity, providing an opening to other cultures'. In addition, 'a high quality language education should foster pupils' curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world'. In tandem, the BFI *Screening Languages* report advocates that the expert MFL teacher is 'open to watching and

exploring new and unfamiliar films [and] willing to explore with pupils the places where film can debate and challenge'. The report goes on to stress the importance of opening up spaces within the classroom where film can be used both to encourage debate and inculcate a supportive environment in which political issues such as race, gender, immigration and *otherness* can be discussed, and the values of tolerance and empathy towards others promoted.

Within the specifically Spanish context, Mark Goodwin states in his excellent article, 'An Analysis of the Success of the 'Cultural Topic'', 'film...stimulates a variety of powerful cognitive processes in a learning context'. This sentiment is shared by Andrea Meador Smith and Sarah Cox Campbell, who state '[the] possibilities for the development of cultural and linguistic skills that result from film screening and analysis are innumerable'. So there is little doubt of the benefits of developing cineliteracy in our pupils across all age groups, promoting the transferable skills of constructive response generation and a sensitive and empathetic response to broader issues in their own societies.

The main issue facing the Spanish teacher is not, however, the availability of filmic material in the target language, but rather the breadth of topics covered, across different genres and national borders. Indeed, the task of integrating film can initially appear overwhelming to the novice, not least due to the vast amount of possibilities, coupled with the need to remain explicit about objectives, delivery and relevance to the linguistic aspect of the scheme of work.

In addition, supportive pedagogical strategies are crucial in order that watching a film is not perceived by pupils as a *passive* rather than *active* task (this is exacerbated by a preponderance of dvd showings in school departments in the last weeks of the summer term as a switch-off activity!). There are also different approaches to the study of film across the various Key Stages of Modern Languages teaching. For example, in Years 7 & 8, short scenes can be used to explore a key theme across various languages with the purpose of discussing a topic such as immigration, and also for promoting the languages which a department offers. For example, selected scenes from *Welcome, Monsieur Lazhar*, *Fuocammare*, *Willkommen in Deutschland*, *Sin nombre* and *Flores de otro mundo* can all be used to explore the multi-faced nature of the immigrant experience.





Isabel Santaolalla has written about the plurality of experience witnessed in European cinema on the topic of immigration: 'shared agendas in these films, as well as in journalistic and academic debates, legitimate the kind of wide-angle focus adopted, particularly at a time when transnational dynamics demand more than ever a discussion of cinema'. Indeed, Smith and Campbell clearly advocate collaboration in the target language or in English with the intention of '[developing] their own definitions of Otherness, using their personal experiences and activating their background knowledge. In groups, students can discuss situations in which they have felt like the Other, sharing the dynamics of the situation that led to feelings of marginalisation. They should think about other classes or areas of their lives – specific examples in literature or film, moments in history or science, stories from current events – in which they can identify one person or group as the Other and explain this distinction to their peers'.

Similar activities are closely allied to the PHSE curriculum and a recent movement in writing, cinema and art of a narrative of the self, succinctly summed up in a module from Leeds University's M.A in Film Studies entitled 'So where do you come from? Selves, Families, Stories'. Indeed, this is a good starting point for any introduction to the theme of BLM through film in any language.

The BLM movement in the summer of 2020 led to policy and curriculum changes that placed greater emphasis on intercultural awareness and exchange in the classroom. Interestingly, it was the moving image that was deemed the most appropriate to explain and address the concept of white privilege, with the central visual symbol of the race with its semiotic significance underscoring the unfairness of 21st century life for BAME communities (the potent final image placing participants at very different starting lines after a series of five key questions). As Carmen Herrero states, 'el cine no sólo constituye un vehículo privilegiado para la expresividad artística, sino que....fomenta una perspectiva crítica sobre...el pensamiento ideológico y de poder que las sustenta'.

Film is therefore perfectly placed to expand pupils' intercultural understanding in an increasingly complex post-modern landscape. In addition, there are many helpful publications which establish cinematic links across national boundaries, such as Isabel Santaollala's *Body Matters: Immigrants in Recent Spanish, Italian and Greek Cinemas*. The convergence of current affairs and cinema easily moulds itself to the A level syllabus, as does the documentary style approach taken in many of the films themselves.



The phenomenon of immigration film is also in its infancy in southern Europe when compared to the UK, Germany and France, for example, where well-established migrant communities have a certain agency as regards their representation, such as the

North African and Turkish populations. Spanish and Italian cinema are, therefore, at a different stage of their evolution and engagement with immigration. As Sandra Ponzanesi asserts, in Italy 'films are intentionally made for a white Italian audience intrigued by the "other" but not yet well equipped for its understanding'.

In many films, the immigrant is seen as ethnically – even 'racially' – marked, following a long Western tradition in which the term 'race' is applied to non-white people/skin/bodies. As Richard Dyer notes, '[a]s long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people'.

Many Spanish and Latin American films can be used to explore issues of race, identity, immigration and Otherness. A small selection from personal choice would include:

- *Roma* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2018)
- *Sin nombre* ( Joji Fukunaga, 2009 )
- *Diarios de motocicleta* (Walter Salles, 2004)
- *El norte* (Gregory Nava, 1983)
- *Relatos salvajes* (Damián Szifron, 2014)
- *Flores de otro mundo* (Icíar Bollaín, 1999)
- *Retorno a Hansala* (Chus Gutiérrez) 2008
- *Machuca* (Andrés Wood, 2004)
- *La Historia Oficial* (Luis Puenzo, 1985)
- *Historias mínimas* (Carlos Sorín, 2002)
- *El secreto de sus ojos* (Juan José Campanella, 2009)
- *El sur* (Víctor Erice, 1983)
- *La lengua de las mariposas* (José Luis Cuerda, 1999)
- *El ciudadano ilustre* ( Duprat / Cohn, 2016)



Specific classroom techniques will depend very much on the age group involved and the specific focus of the lesson. These activities could be used within a sequence of lessons at A level in order to introduce the Cultural Topic film, or lower down the school. Indeed, the sooner that pupils are introduced to film analysis the more fine-tuned their critical

faculties become. Activities can be embedded into a scheme of work, used as a one-off cultural insert or within a cross-curricular PHSE programme or project.

Here is a list of some techniques that can be used to great effect with KS3, 4 or 5 in order to promote linguistic ability, cultural competences and general debate about the issue of 'Otherness' – identity, gender, immigration and the individual within wider society.

- Study of a film trailer, eliciting key information as regards genre, theme, character and specific camera techniques (official trailers have ratings).
- Analysis of a series of stills from a given film or several films on the same topic. For example, as a stand-alone exercise, the masterful composition of Cuarón's *Roma* is hard to beat. Immigration could be explored via style and character perspective through selected sequences in *Flores de otro mundo*, *Sin nombre* and *Retorno a Hansala*.
- Translation and reading comprehension exercises can be easily prepared from both English and Spanish online newspaper reviews, with older pupils able to write essays or prepare speaking debates according to the critical opinions they have read.
- Time-consuming but useful is the preparation of listening exercises for dialogue or summaries in Spanish of key scenes – useful for speaking practice or Cultural Topic essay practice.
- A thematic approach to the introduction of film is popular, especially with the wide selection of films available about the Spanish Civil War and Franco regime. A high level exploration of allegory and perspective can be achieved with a comparison of Saura and Erice's films released during the Franco regime (*Cría Cuervos* and *El espíritu de la Colmena*) and the later wave of turn of the century films which coincided with the *Ley de la Memoria*

*Histórica* finally passed in 2007 (*La lengua de las mariposas* [1999] and *Las trece Rosas* [2007]).

- Exploring cinematography is rewarding, and pupils are often very adept at it. It is easy to put together a series of stills or excerpts from Spanish and Latin American films to illustrate extreme wide shots (*Diarios de motocicleta*), close-ups (*Un chien andalou*), establishing shots (*Jamón, jamón*) and time lapse (*El sur*).
- Creative writing opportunities through the preparation of reviews or essays comparing the treatment of a theme through diverse film sequences.
- Ideally, film can be introduced as a 'Fifth Skill' in languages. Year 7 pupils are provided with the tools and skills through which they become familiar with cinematic techniques so that they can express both analysis and opinion using the correct terminology. This can be developed generically across languages, with the skill-set becoming increasingly sophisticated as the pupils progress from Lower to Upper School.
- Finally, the appeal of cinema within the pupil body is broad, and they already have many of the pre-requisite skills to make Film Studies a complementary part of Modern Languages study – namely, visual literacy, along with a critical and discerning eye informed by the regular absorption of filmic images across television, film and advertising. Interesting films can open up Modern Languages to all pupils across the ability range, improve their linguistic skill and enable them to explore other societies and cultures.



# The myth of racial democracy in Cuba and Brazil



By BAS editor Sander Berg

A YEAR OR TWO AGO my friend and colleague Ransford, who is from Ghana, came back from Cuba absolutely raving about the place. What had thrilled him so were not the spectacular limestone hills around Viñales known as *mogotes*, where he had gone to climb; it was not the decaying colonial grandeur of Old Havana and the crumbling palaces of the Vedado; it wasn't the beaches or the cigars or the cocktails or the American jalopies cruising along the Malecón. What he could not get over was the people, and more specifically, how race did not seem to be an issue. His impression was that everyone, from creamy white to dark chocolate and all the shades in between, mingled without prejudice. This had come to him as a revelation; he had never been anywhere like it.

Fidel Castro would have been proud of this assessment since it was proof that the Revolution had done away with racial inequality and racism. Or so the official message goes.

Propaganda usually entails a gulf between the party line and reality. In Cuba, however, this discrepancy is not so



obvious. I too remember going to Cuba for the first time and having the exact same feeling, although probably less vehemently because I'm white and therefore not familiar with my ethnicity being (perceived as) a problem. And it wasn't just Cuba; I had the same sensation when I first travelled around Brazil.

What happened was that both my colleague and I swallowed the myth of racial democracy hook, line and sinker. We swallowed it because at some level we desperately wanted it to be true. Because let's face it, wouldn't it be marvellous to think that there is a place under the sun where Dr King's dream has come true and you are judged not by the colour of your skin but by the content of your character? Wouldn't it be amazing to experience a post-racial paradise?



But the seduction of the myth of racial democracy lies in more than just our desire for a better world. An important reason why people buy into it, and this includes Cubans and Brazilians themselves, is that race is less binary in Latin America than it is in the UK and the US. Racial categories are more fluid, and there are more of them.

Let me make clear that I use the word "race" to refer to a cultural construct. We all know there is no biological basis for race whatsoever. In the English-speaking world,

and in particular in the US, the so-called "one-drop rule" is applied. This goes back to nineteenth and early twentieth century "scientific" racism and the despicable idea that "black blood pollutes white blood", so that anyone with even one drop of African blood was considered Black. And even now it is still the case that someone with discernible African ancestry is seen as and will self-identify as Black (with a capital letter because it is an identity, not a colour). Barack Obama, Bob Marley, Zadie Smith, Bernadine Evaristo and David Olusoga are all Black, even though they have one white parent.

The Latin American world received far greater numbers of enslaved Africans than the US. Brazil received perhaps eight times as many, Spanish America five. The sexual unions of Africans and Europeans in Latin America produced mulattoes, or *pardos* as they are known in Brazil (the word means "brown" in Portuguese). There were other mixed-race categories too. The descendants of indigenous people and Europeans were known as *mestizos*, those of Africans and indigenous

people as *zambos*. In theory there were many more permutations, up to 16 or even 52. Latin American colonial society was a *sociedad de castas* organised along socio-racial lines, with European-born Spaniards at the top.



Just below them there were American-born Spaniards known as *criollos*. At the bottom you had the enslaved population. And somewhere in between there were the *mestizos*, the *indios* and the freed slaves, many of them mulattoes.

In modern Latin America people still distinguish between white, mulatto/*pardo*, Black, *mestizo* and indigenous. Which racio-ethnic category you belong to is largely a matter of self-identification. There are no officials with clipboards going round the country taking down your “race” – at least, I’ve never seen any. This allows for a degree of fluidity. Between one survey and the next, for example, someone can change their mind and no longer identify as mulatto but as Black or vice versa. There is less of a black/white dichotomy, which makes it harder to pitch one group against the other, as happens in the US.

Cuba and Brazil abolished slavery very late. They were in fact the last of the American countries to do so, Cuba in 1886 and Brazil in 1888. But unlike the US, these countries never had Jim Crow laws. These would have been hard to enforce anyway, because what do you do with all those people of mixed ancestry, of which



there are many more than Blacks? In Brazil 43% of the population is *pardo*, but only 7% identify as Afro-Brazilian—47% is white and the rest is made up of other groups, including indigenous people and a sizeable Japanese community in São Paulo. In Cuba 9% see themselves as Afro-Cuban, compared with 27% who consider themselves to be mulattoes, while the remaining 64% are white. So instead of fighting segregation and having a civil rights movement, Latin Americans of colour were told, and perhaps also told themselves, they lived in racial harmony.

Officially, everyone gets along swimmingly, but look closer and you'll discover that skin colour correlates with socioeconomic status: the fairer your skin, the more likely you are to be well-off and the less likely you are to live in a favela or a downtrodden part of Havana. The opening up of the economy in Cuba has created opportunities to earn much-coveted *dólares*. But these opportunities are disproportionately favouring fair-skinned Cubans. What often happens is that jobs, say, in tourism require someone to look “presentable”, which, in Cuba in this context, is code for “fair-skinned”. And when you consider who actually runs the country, it is even clearer that Cuba and Brazil are “pigmentocracies”. Fidel's revolutionaries were virtually all white, and it was not until the after his brother Raúl Castro stepped down in 2019 that a serious effort was made to include more Afro-Cubans at the top. The current situation in Brazil is particularly dire, with Bolsonaro's government being 100% white.



In both Brazil and Cuba the myth of racial democracy has deep roots and is caught up with the nation's idea of itself. This deep-rootedness makes it very hard for Afro-Cubans and Afro-Brazilians to talk about racism and discrimination. How can you accuse someone – or a system – of a bias that is not acknowledged to be there?

The future does not bode well unless Afro-Cubans and Afro-Brazilians create a powerful movement to denounce discrimination and the systemic, institutional



racism that is clearly rife. Paradoxically, they (we) need to burst the myth of racial democracy if they (we) are ever going to achieve it.

---

## REFERENCES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING AND WATCHING

*Afro Cuba Libre*, a mini-documentary on race in Cuba (10 mins) available on Youtube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G\\_OzkISsyDo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_OzkISsyDo)

Andrews, George Reid, *Afro-Latin America 1800-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

*Black in Latin America*, Prof. Henry Louis Gates's four-part series, available on Amazon Prime

Thomas, Hugh *The Slave Trade. The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870*, paperback (London: Phoenix, 2006)

Wade, Peter, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Pluto Press, 2010); "Race in Latin America", chapter from a book, available online <https://personalpages.manchester.ac.uk/staff/peter.wade/articles/Blackwell%20Poole.pdf>

# Microhistoria de España

*By William Chislett – Investigador senior asociado del Real Instituto Elcano*

Mi Microhistoria de España es fruto de mi larga relación con el país.



Yo llegué a España cuando era aún un joven periodista en 1974, el año antes de que muriera el entonces dictador, el general Franco. Mi intención era pasar una breve temporada enseñando inglés en Madrid y regresar a mis labores periodísticas en Gran Bretaña, pero, en vez de ello, y por influencia de mi entonces novia (y hoy esposa) y de mis amigos españoles, me quedé un poco más. Según un chiste que circulaba desde hacía tiempo por aquel entonces, miles de españoles tenían un dedo índice más corto de lo normal de las muchas veces que habían repiqueteado con él en la mesa o mesita que tenían más a mano para enfatizar cada año su esperanza de que ese en concreto fuera el último de vida de Franco.



Cuando finalmente falleció, en 1975, a los ochenta y dos años de edad, España, un rincón periférico y relativamente atrasado del sur de Europa, apenas conocido más que por su turismo de masas, las corridas de toros, el flamenco, la siesta y su dictador, pasó de la noche a la mañana a ser un foco central de la atención internacional ante los temores de que el país pudiera sumirse en una nueva guerra civil.

Volví al periodismo después de que Harry Debelius, veterano corresponsal en Madrid del *Times* de Londres, me contratara como colaborador suyo. Fueron tres años

muy intensos durante los que entrevisté a muchos de los protagonistas clave de la transición a la democracia, incluido el rey Juan Carlos. El monarca, a quien los comunistas, por mal nombre, apodaron «Juan Carlos el Breve» cuando accedió al trono, pues preveían que pronto sería barrido de la escena política junto con los demás vestigios del régimen franquista, recordó durante nuestro encuentro un chiste que se contaba sobre él. «¿Por qué me coronaron en un submarino? Porque en el fondo no soy tan tonto». Y desde luego que no: ni en el fondo ni en la superficie, a juzgar por su papel en la admirablemente tranquila transición a la democracia que tuvo lugar durante esos años (la primera saldada con éxito en la turbulenta historia de España) y que se convertiría en una especie de modelo para los países latinoamericanos y para los excomunistas.



En el otro extremo del espectro político, también entrevisté (en el club de golf de Biarritz, en su «santuario» del suroeste de Francia) a José Miguel Beñarán Ordeñana (alias «Argala»), miembro del comando de la organización independentista violenta vasca ETA que detonó una bomba en diciembre de 1973 al paso del coche del almirante Luis Carrero Blanco, que era, a sus setenta años de edad, el presidente del Gobierno y previsible heredero político de Franco. En 1976, mi esposa y yo habíamos comprado una casa en ruinas en un vetusto pueblo de Castilla-La Mancha, en la región donde transcurren las andanzas del protagonista de *El Quijote*, de Miguel de Cervantes. El lugar carecía de instalaciones de agua corriente, no

tenía casi ninguna calle asfaltada y su escuela de primaria estaba muy deteriorada. Para hacer una simple llamada telefónica había que pasar por una operadora que era hija de uno de los dueños del bar de la localidad, y el quiosco más cercano donde comprar un periódico estaba a 17 kilómetros de allí. Hoy hace ya muchos años que tenemos agua corriente, que todas las calles están asfaltadas, y que disponemos de centralita telefónica automática, así como también de internet, un moderno centro de educación de primaria y un ambulatorio. En la distancia, sobre uno de los cerros que delimitan el extenso embalse que hay junto al pueblo, veinticinco turbinas eólicas de cien metros de altura que presiden el paisaje como

si fueran una versión moderna de los molinos de viento gigantes contra los que luchaba Don Quijote en la novela generan electricidad. En la actualidad, España es el segundo mayor productor mundial de energía eólica por detrás de Alemania. España se ha transformado en muchos sentidos. Pero sorprende lo poco que se conoce aún de este país (la cuarta mayor economía de la eurozona y la decimotercera del mundo) tanto dentro como fuera de sus fronteras más allá de sus estereotipos, que perviven pese a su profunda discordancia con la realidad.

La percepción sobre España ha cambiado poco desde entonces. ¿Cuántas personas, por ejemplo, saben que muchos británicos actualmente hablan por teléfono, encienden la luz, realizan gestiones bancarias, viajan en metro, vuelan desde algunos aeropuertos, abren un grifo o tiran de la cadena del retrete gracias a empresas españolas que han adquirido compañías que prestan esos servicios en el Reino Unido? Los españoles también tienen una esperanza de vida mayor que la británica.



También las actitudes morales han experimentado un cambio radical. A mi esposa y a mí nos impidieron alojarnos en un hotel en Ávila en 1974 porque no disponíamos de un «Libro de familia» que atestiguara que estábamos casados. Lo cierto era que lo estábamos, pero ninguna de nuestras quejas de que ningún documento parecido a ese se emitía en el Reino Unido para los matrimonios británicos sirvió para nada.

Hoy España es un Estado aconfesional y la Iglesia católica ha perdido buena parte de su poder y su influencia; y en el ámbito de la moral, España es un lugar tan liberal como otros países europeos (cuando no más permisivo que ellos incluso). En 2005, España pasó a ser el cuarto país del mundo donde se legalizó el matrimonio entre personas del mismo sexo, un hito nada desdeñable si tenemos en cuenta que el franquismo encarcelaba a las personas homosexuales.

El libro procede por orden cronológico en el formato de preguntas y respuestas, y va desde los tiempos de los fenicios hasta la actualidad más reciente, incluyendo:

- ¿De donde viene el nombre de España?
- ¿Cuál fue el legado de la presencia musulmana entre 711 y 1492?
- ¿Por qué España entró en decadencia en el siglo xvii?
- ¿Qué clase de dictadura instauró Franco?



- ¿Cómo se logró la transición a la democracia?
- ¿Qué impacto tuvo el ingreso en la Comunidad Económica Europea?
- ¿Cómo se convirtió España en uno de los países más progresistas en cuestiones sociales y morales?
- ¿Hacia dónde vamos?
- 

Se concentra especialmente en los últimos ochenta años. Así permite que los lectores aprecien mejor el progreso de España a lo largo de los siglos (una evolución en ocasiones caracterizada por un paso adelante y dos atrás) y comprendan más a fondo aquellos aspectos de la historia del país que mejor ayudan a explicar tensiones o conflictos políticos relevantes en la actualidad. Debido al carácter comprimido de este libro, apenas si puede llegar a penetrar más allá de la superficie de la cuestión, pero humildemente me conformo con que anime al lector a seguir ahondando en ella.

España ha enterrado muchos de los fantasmas de su pasado autoritario reciente, pero no todos ellos. Su sistema democrático es muy dinámico, si bien la clase política ha perdido entre la ciudadanía el lustre del que gozara durante la Transición de 1975-1978, cuando el consenso fue la consigna y el espíritu que guid sus acciones.



El descontento generalizado con los dos principales partidos, el Partido Popular (PP) y el Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), nació en buena medida de la profunda recesión que siguió al estallido de una ingente burbuja inmobiliaria en 2008 y a la crisis financiera internacional.

La espectacular caída en el sector de la construcción fue la principal causa de que se disparara la tasa de desempleo española hasta el 26 por ciento en 2013, más del doble que la tasa europea media. La recesión, las políticas de austeridad que la siguieron y las revelaciones de extendidas corruptelas en la ya desacreditada clase política del país sacudieron los cimientos económicos, políticos, institucionales y sociales españoles después de lo que había sido un prolongado periodo de estabilidad.



El dominio de los socialistas y los populares quedó tocado en las elecciones generales de diciembre de 2015, cuando dos partidos nuevos, Ciudadanos y Podemos, obtuvieron escaños en el Congreso por vez primera. Otro partido, el ultraderechista Vox, irrumpió también en el escenario político nacional en 2019. Entre diciembre de 2015 y noviembre de 2019 se han celebrado cuatro elecciones generales, una cifra récord para un país de la Unión Europea. El líder socialista Pedro Sánchez fue investido presidente en enero de 2020, tras ocho meses de interinidad, por la mayoría parlamentaria más ajustada en cuarenta años, al ser respaldado por 167 diputados frente a 165 noes, con 18 abstenciones. El suyo es el primer Gobierno central de coalición en España desde la Segunda República (1931-1939), constituido por ministros del PSOE y de Unidas Podemos, formación de izquierda más radical.

Mientras tanto, el ímpetu del independentismo catalán no ha mostrado síntomas de amainar. El Tribunal Supremo condenó en octubre de 2019 a nueve líderes separatistas a entre nueve y trece años de cárcel por su participación en la organización de un referéndum ilegal sobre la secesión de Cataluña en 2017 y por la consiguiente declaración unilateral de independencia. Fue la más grave crisis institucional vivida por el país desde el fallido golpe de 1981.

España se ha enfrentado a muchos desafíos que solo han podido ser afrontados de verdad cuando los políticos han aparcado sus diferencias para trabajar por el bien del país en su conjunto. Ojalá sepan recuperar el consenso que caracterizó a la política española durante la Transición.

# César Vallejo (1892-1938): His Life and Work



By BAS editor Stephen Hart

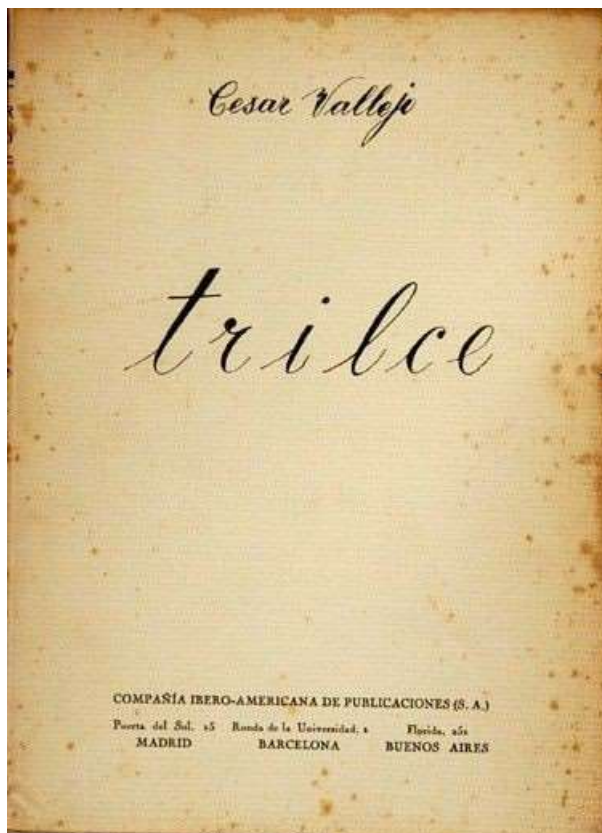
Born in a tiny village in the Andes of Peru, Santiago de Chuco, on 16 March 1892, César Vallejo was unique in more ways than one. Both his mother, Maria de los Santos Mendoza Gurrionero (1850-1918), and his father, Francisco de Paula Vallejo Benites (1840-1924) had fathers who were Catholic priests. This had led them to experience a degree of social ostracisation in early life, as Osvaldo Vázquez Vallejo and Santiago Aguilar have argued.<sup>44</sup> Some of this ostracisation and alienation rubbed off on Vallejo, and was evident in the poems he would write later on in life.



Vallejo attended primary school in Santiago de Chuco in 1900-1905 and secondary school in a nearby village, Huamachuco (1905-1908). In 1910 he enrolled in the Faculty of Humanities at La Libertad University in Trujillo, graduating in 1915 with a thesis on Romanticism in Spanish literature which clearly inspired his first collection of poems, *Los heraldos*

*negros*. This book, printed in 1918 though only distributed in 1919, established Vallejo as an important poet.

In August 1920 the commercial premises of an important landowner, Carlos Santa María, were burned to the ground in Vallejo's home town in murky circumstances, and Vallejo was accused of being involved. He fled and lay low for a few months in a friend's house in Mansiche, a town near Trujillo. While there he had a dream in which he saw himself dead in Paris surrounded by people he did not recognise; he described this experience in the poem he later wrote, 'Piedra negra sobre una piedra blanca'.



In November 1920 he was captured by the police and spent 112 days in Trujillo's prison, where he wrote a number of the poems that would come together as *Trilce*, his second collection of poems. He was released from jail as a result of a popular appeal in February 1921 and quickly moved to Lima to escape the scandal.

In October 1922 *Trilce* came out, the same month as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Whereas T.S. Eliot's collection brought the American fame and fortune, Vallejo's book was a complete failure. It was written in a Dadaist style and local readers found it incomprehensible.

In June 1923 the lawsuit against Vallejo was re-opened. The following month he fled to France, arriving in Paris on 13 July

never to return home. His early years in Paris were marked by abject poverty but in 1926 he met Georgette de Phillipart, who soon became his permanent companion and whom he would marry in 1932.

Vallejo began reading Marxist theory in the late 1920s. He visited the Soviet Union three times and became politically committed, influenced first by Trotskyism and then by Stalinism. The poems he was writing at the time show the mark of this influence; they would be published after his death with a title provided by Georgette, *Poemas humanos*. In December 1930, as a result of his political



activities, Vallejo was expelled from France, and he travelled with Georgette to Madrid, living in a modest house on Calle del Acuerdo.



In 1932 Vallejo was permitted to return to Paris as long as he reported to a local police station. In July 1936, his life was overtaken by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Vallejo became an ardent supporter of the Republicans in their struggle against Franco's troops, and he attended the Second International Writers' Congress held in Valencia and Madrid in July 1937. He began writing poems about Spain's tragedy, which would come together as *España, aparta de mí este cáliz*.

On Good Friday, 15 April 1938, Vallejo died of a mysterious illness. His widow published his posthumous poems the following year.

Vallejo's fame grew exponentially after his death, and he is now seen as one of Latin America's most important poets.

For a writer such as T.S. Eliot the quotidian circumstances of a poet are not as important as the work that he or she writes, and in most cases will be irrelevant for the understanding of the poet's work. However, this does not apply in César Vallejo's case. As Angel Rama has pointed out, Vallejo's poetry is highly autobiographical. He writes about the childhood he spent with his siblings – Aguedita, Nativia, and Miguel – in Tr. III, about his father in 'Enereida', his mother in Tr. LXV, and he writes an elegy to his brother Miguel who died tragically young in 'A mi hermano Miguel'.

His poetry is also full of references to everyday events, such as his daily discussions about life with his wife, Georgette, and going out for a walk in the afternoon to buy the newspaper, in 'Ello es el lugar donde me pongo...'. In 'La de a mil' he uses the desperate cry of a lonely lottery-ticket seller in a street in Trujillo as the springboard for a poem about fate, destiny and God's will.

His poem, 'Batallas III' was inspired by the account of how a Republican soldier killed during the Spanish Civil War was found with a message in his pocket to warn his friends of the impending attack by Franco's Nationalist troops, along with a



spoon in his other pocket with which he ate his war rations. Throughout the War Vallejo would follow its progress, and his poems refer to specific places where battles were fought. *España, aparta de mí este cáliz* is like a personal poetic journal of the War.

Vallejo's poetry went through a number of different phases — Romanticism, *modernismo*, Dadaism, Marxism and Christian Marxism. One of Vallejo's most famous poems which Peruvian schoolchildren are required to declaim before their classmates to this day is 'Los heraldos negros'. It is a powerful poem, written in the style of the Romantic poets of nineteenth century Europe such as José de Espronceda and Lord Byron.

For many years Vallejo's first collection of poems was seen against the backdrop of *modernismo*, the Latin American poetic movement spearheaded by the Guatemalan poet, Rubén Darío (Vallejo apparently cried openly in front of all his friends when he heard news in 1916 while dining in a restaurant in Trujillo that Rubén Darío had died). However, it is more appropriate to see the collection as mainly a set of Romantic poems.<sup>[1]</sup> The terrible event that inspired the lead poem of the collection was the news that his older sister had been raped by a powerful landowner in the family's home town, Santiago de Chuco.<sup>[2]</sup> This turns the poem into a cry against the injustice of the world, very much in the style of the Romantics. God is also invoked, though in negative terms, since we hear about the 'odio de Dios' in this poem. Another indication that this is very much a late-Romantic collection of poems is 'Espergesia', which is clearly a poem written under the aegis of Friedrich Nietzsche's work in its indication that

Yo nací un día  
que Dios estuvo enfermo  
grave

Nietzsche's work had an enormous impact in Spain and Latin America in the early twentieth century as a result of the translation of his work into Spanish. His *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Thus spoke Zarathustra) came out in Spanish in 1900 in a translation, *Así hablaba Zaratustra*, by Juan Fernández, possibly a pseudonym of the Spanish philosopher, Miguel de Unamuno.<sup>[3]</sup> Vallejo was part of a group of

young writers, the Bohemia, who used to idolise Nietzsche, reciting memorised passages from *Así hablaba Zarathustra* and declaiming his work in the streets of Trujillo.<sup>[4]</sup> In 'Espergesia' Vallejo is essentially posing as Zarathustra, and using not only the idea that God is dead ('Gott ist tot!') but that he remains dead ('Gott bleibt tot!'),<sup>[5]</sup> a concept that is poetically transformed into the poetic idea that God was seriously ill on the day that Vallejo was born.

How Vallejo came to write his work *Trilce* (1922), seen by many as the single most important avant-garde poetry collection published in the Spanish language, so soon after publishing his Romantic work, *Los heraldos negros*, is something of a mystery for *vallejistas*. The most likely explanation is that he fell under the spell of the Dadaists, especially the French section of that movement, as argued by Carlos Fernández.<sup>[6]</sup> The Dadaists were highly controversial artists in the 1910s and 1920s who rejected and attacked all certainties, whether they were literary, philosophical, political or religious – indeed they even rejected the idea that meaning existed. Their radical approach to language may well be at the heart of the experimentation we find in *Trilce* whereby words are run together ('Lomismo'; Tr. II, l. 15) and capitalised at the end instead of the beginning of the word ('nombrE'; Tr. II, l. 16), or have been conflated to become a new word ('excrementido' as a mixture of 'excrementado' and 'mentido', Tr. XIX, l. 5), or deliberately mis-spelt ('qué la bamos a hhazer'; Tr. IV, l. 9), or broken down ('Vusco volvvver de golpe el golpe', Tr. IX, l. 1), or spelt backwards ('Odumodneurtse', Tr. XIII, l. 16), or become simply sounds ('Rumbbb... Trrraprrrr rrach...', Tr. XXXII, l. 2), or are put together in such a way that they seem more like a collection of unconnected words rather than a poem (Tr. XXV).

A clue as to why Vallejo made the decision to experiment so much with language is provided in the third stanza of Tr. XXXVI:

Rehusad, y vosotros, a posar las platas  
en la seguridad dupla de la Armonía.  
Rehusad la simetría a buen seguro.  
¡Intervenid en el conflicto  
de puntas que se disputan  
en la más torionda de las justas  
el salto por el ojo de la aguja!

Here is Vallejo's *ars poetica*: all poets should reject the easy symmetry of perfectly measured lines of verse with the same number of syllables in each one (the hexameter or the pentameter, for example), and should face the chaos of the

modern world which – in the 1920s – was epitomised by inventions such as the motorcar, the aeroplane, neon lights, machine guns, chemical warfare, X-rays, automation...The paradigm-shift brought about by technology meant that the old icons of the past – such as the Venus de Milo statue held in the Louvre museum and revered for its beauty – no longer had any meaningful role to play in modern society.

As a poet Vallejo reacted to this new technological step-change by re-assessing his own tools – the rhyme system, the sonnet, the Alexandrine, for example. Finding them wanting, he chose to junk them. Turning to his most intrinsic tool, language, he begins to create something completely new, transforming nouns such as ‘amoníaco’ and adjectives such as ‘manco’ (one-armed) into verbs, adverbs such as ‘todavía’ into verbs, and adverbs such as ‘aun’ into nouns. By doing so, Vallejo is in effect opening up language, and creating new vehicles of vision out of the remnants of eviscerated words. The struggle to create a new universe, he argues in this poem, will be full of conflict and as difficult as trying to leap through the eye of a needle, but Vallejo the Dadaist is committed to this visceral, almost physical struggle with language.

Although he left Peru in 1923 principally to escape the risk of imprisonment (as mentioned above), the dream of seeing Paris, the artistic capital of the world, must have influenced that decision. Vallejo visited museums, saw plays, met poets such as Pablo Neruda, artists such as Picasso and musicians such as Erik Satie. Vallejo decided to try his luck with a new type of poem which the French poet Charles Baudelaire had made famous, the ‘poème en prose’, and he wrote a number of poems in that style. Though not as iconoclastic as the poems of *Trilce*, poems such as ‘El buen sentido’, ‘La violencia de la horas’, and ‘Voy a hablar de la esperanza’, show that Vallejo was experimenting with new forms of poetic expression that were not constrained by the limits of stanzaic structure and rhyme scheme.

Vallejo was searching for a new voice in his poetry at this time, one in which he could imitate and express the rhythms of quotidian language. In his posthumous *Poemas humanos* and *España, aparta de mí este cáliz*, he successfully achieved the expression of everyday speech. Though the poems do occasionally use recondite imagery and complicated syntax, they are more recognisably reactions to an everyday occurrence. Thus, finding out that the Court of Justice in Trujillo had issued a warrant for his arrest and extradition led to ‘Piedra negra sobre una piedra blanca’; reflections on the hardship of being unemployed in Paris in the 1930s produced ‘Considerando en frío, imparcialmente...’; reflecting on the dignity of the poor gave rise to ‘Los desgraciados’.



The *Poemas humanos* also have a distinctive prophetic tone in which Vallejo predicts his own death. The best example, of course, is the justly famous first stanza of 'Piedra negra sobre una piedra blanca':

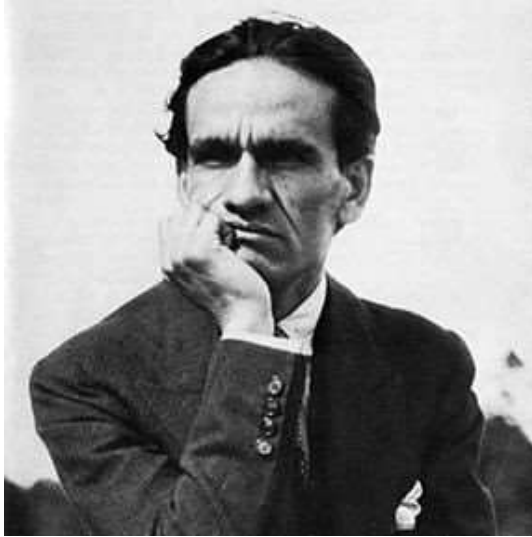
Me moriré en París con aguacero,  
un día del cual tengo ya el recuerdo.  
Me moriré en París – y yo me corro-  
tal vez en jueves, como es hoy, de otoño.

Imagining his own death in Christ-like terms – he 'sees' that 'le pegaban / todos sin que él les haga nada' – he draws attention to how Thursdays, his bones, his loneliness, the rain and the roads are all witnesses of his plight and are, as it were, on his side, unlike the real-life witnesses that were ganging up on him back in Peru. Other poems such as 'París, Octubre 1936' and 'Despedida recordando un adiós' are also poems in which Vallejo is focussed on death, although in these two poems, written in the late 1930s, Vallejo is also saying farewell to life.

Pointing in a similar direction, he is writing a predictive post mortem of his life in 'Aniversario', written on 31 October 1937 to commemorate the fourteenth anniversary of his arrival in Paris and making clear that he senses that there is unlikely to be a fifteenth anniversary. Sure enough, he would not make it to July of the following year, succumbing to a mysterious illness in the spring. This premonition is suggested by the fourth stanza of the poem:

¿Te diré ahora,  
quince feliz, ajeno, quince de otros?  
Nada más que no crece ya el cabello,  
que han venido por las cartas,  
que me brillan los seres que he parido,  
que no hay nadie en mi tumba  
y que me han confundido con mi llanto.

The fifteenth is owned by 'others' because it will not be owned by him. His hair will no longer be growing, since he will already be dead by that time, and they (i.e. the critics) will have come for his letters. 'The beings' that he has 'given birth to' will 'shine': this is clearly a reference to his poems for which he would become famous after his death. The last line quoted above is a warning to those biographers who confuse Vallejo's tears with his innermost being. We shouldn't just see him, Vallejo warns us, as the 'crying' poet, the poet of sadness.



Vallejo's last collection of fifteen poems, *España, aparta de mí este cáliz*, is considered by many to be the most significant poetry collection dedicated to the Spanish Civil War written in the Spanish language. Unlike the poems written by Spanish poets such as Miguel Hernández, Manuel Altolaguirre and Vicente Aleixandre, and other Latin American poets such as the Chilean Pablo Neruda and the Cuban, Nicolás Guillén, Vallejo creates a rhetorical framework in which Marxism and

Christianity are brought together in celebration of the ability of the Republican militiaman to overcome the limitations of death. In a way it was an early foretaste of liberation theology, encapsulated in probably his most famous poem, XII (Masa), in which Vallejo imagines the whole world coming together in order to destroy war and death:

Entonces, todos los hombres de la tierra  
le rodearon; les vio el cadáver triste, emocionado;  
incorporóse lentamente,  
abrazó al primer hombre; echóse a andar...

[1] Stephen Hart, 'El desenmascaramiento de la ideología burguesa en Los heraldos negros de César Vallejo', *Espergesia*, 6.1 (January-July 2019), 1-18.

[2] Stephen Hart, *César Vallejo: una biografía literaria*, traducción de Nadia Stagnaro (Lima: Cátedra Vallejo, 2014), pp. 20-23. When his parents died their graves were buried outside the wall of the local cemetery in Santiago de Chuco. They are now safely within the hallowed ground of the cemetery since the cemetery was expanded some years after their death, and the new boundary wall brought them inside the cemetery.

[3] Stephen Hart, *César Vallejo: una biografía literaria*, pp. 76-78.

[4] Stephen M. Hart, 'Vallejo entre "dos aguas encontradas" en Los heraldos negros', *Cuadernos Americanos*, 170.4 (2019), 33-56 (p. 39).

[5] 'Con César Vallejo en la otra orilla', *Cuadernos Americanos*, 3 (May-June 1973), 199-205.

[6] Stephen M. Hart, 'Vallejo entre "dos aguas encontradas" en Los heraldos negros', p. 49.

[7] 'El nuevo impar, potente de orfandad. César Vallejo y la crítica fundacional frente a la filiación dadaísta de Trilce', PhD, School of European Languages, Culture and Society, UCL, 2020.

# Ruiz Zafón o la fórmula del éxito

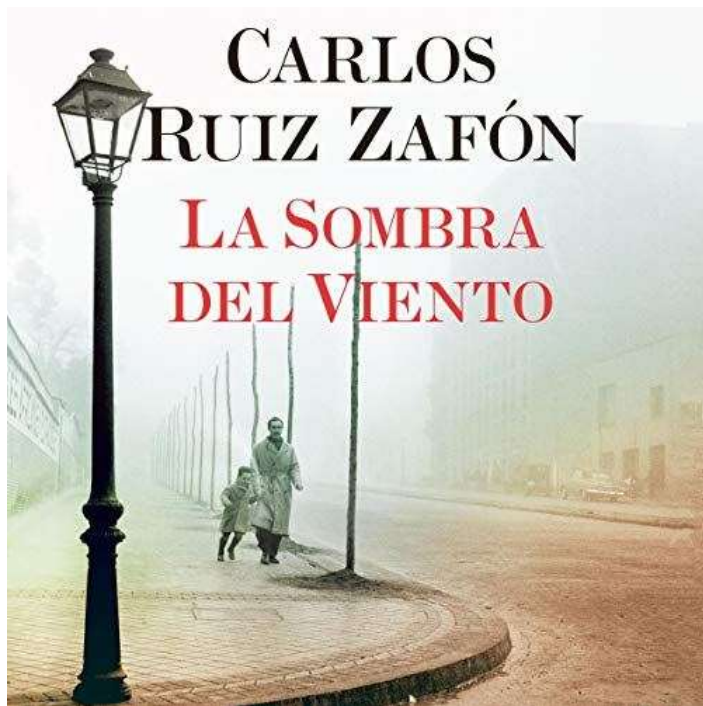


By BAS editor Alfredo Benito

*“Daniel, bienvenido al Cementerio de los Libros Olvidados”*

Aún conservo en algún rincón de la memoria ese fragmento del fenómeno editorial *La sombra de viento* en el que el padre de Daniel Sempere sumergía al lector en ese espacio mítico que entonces muchos desconocíamos se convertiría en una tetralogía más que exitosa.

Admito que siempre tuve cierta alergia a los libros “superventas”. Al igual que los lugares turísticos infectados de gente con cámara al cuello o de los *reality* televisivos que exhiben las miserias morales y mentales del ser humano, trato de huir cual gato escaldado de cualquier evento que consiga poner de acuerdo a la masa.



Quizás por ello, me sentí afortunado por haberme tropezado con el libro franquicia de Ruiz Zafón antes de la avalancha de elogios. Como diría en su momento el ex ministro de exteriores alemán, Joschka Fischer: *“si empiezas a leer esta novela, no la dejas hasta terminar”*. Y honestamente, eso es lo que hice, no parar hasta terminar de devorar una historia que reunía todos los ingredientes de la literatura “fácil de consumir” -la intriga, el punto justo de fantasía e imaginación, la acción trepidante, personajes fácilmente

identificables- pero con el añadido de unos diálogos afilados, una cierta complejidad en las tramas, su pequeña dosis de metaliteratura y una descripción cuasi cinematográfica de la ciudad de Barcelona.

Reunir en torno a un libro a lectores habituales y a no lectores solo se consigue con talento. No en vano, estamos hablando del escritor español más leído en el mundo solo por detrás de un tal Miguel de Cervantes. Traducido a las principales lenguas, publicado en 50 países y leído por más de 25 millones de personas, *La sombra del viento* (2001) supuso el último gran milagro editorial español.

En un país con uno de los índices de lectura de Europa más bajos, el éxito de Zafón tuvo aún más mérito. El mérito de atraer a esa parte de la población que nunca lee. Al contrario que en Londres, no era habitual en el metro de Madrid ver a gente leyendo. Con Ruiz Zafón, los vagones se llenaron de narices pegadas al papel.

Si uno repasa su trayectoria, parece que todo estaba planeado desde el principio en la ordenada cabeza de Ruiz Zafón. Sus primeros pasos en la literatura juvenil allanaron el camino de lo que sería después su salto a la literatura adulta. Ya en su primera novela, *El príncipe de la niebla* (1993), asoma ese mundo tan particular repleto de fantasía, romance y aventuras: el cóctel perfecto para un adolescente que quisiera acercarse al universo de la lectura. Precisamente su última obra juvenil, *Marina* (1999), alabada por la crítica, parece pensada como precuela de su



exitosa tetralogía. Las listas de lectura de los institutos en España le deben mucho al gran Zafón.



Honestamente y siendo crítico, me temo que muchos coincidirán conmigo en que a medida que la saga de los Sempere, Carax, Aldaya y compañía avanzaba, el producto iba menguando en interés y quizás también en calidad. El fuerte aroma a Dickens en sus novelas y un quizás excesivo protagonismo de la ciudad de Barcelona en lo que parecía ser casi la creación de un nuevo subgénero, el turismo literario, “cansaron” algo al lector no fanático de Ruiz Zafón. El auténtico fan, sin embargo, se quedaba extasiado leyendo anécdotas tan curiosas como la relativa a la foto de portada -del gran fotógrafo Catalá-Roca- de *La sombra del viento*. Tan bien conocía Ruiz Zafón su ciudad que nada más verla comentó: “*esa farola no puede ser Barcelona*”. Y en efecto la foto mostraba una estampa callejera de Madrid.

La historia de Carlos Ruiz Zafón se aleja del tópico del escritor. Periodista de formación, publicista en sus inicios y con alma de guionista de cine. Algo que se refleja de forma nítida en su buen ojo para los diálogos en todas y cada una de sus obras. Paradójicamente, los múltiples cantos de sirena que recibió del mundo del cine para llevar sus trabajos a la pantalla – ¿Quién no ha visualizado a muchos de sus personajes, muchas de sus tramas y



muchos de los escenarios que describe? – acabaron en nada debido a la rotunda negativa del autor al respecto.

Fruto quizás de su coherencia vital el escritor barcelonés se mudó muy pronto a la ciudad del cine: Los Angeles. Allí le alcanzó la muerte el pasado 19 de junio a los 55 años a causa de un cáncer de colon contra el que venía luchando los últimos años.

Como buen escritor, ya de culto, Zafón tendrá el homenaje póstumo literario que merece. El próximo 17 de noviembre su editorial, Planeta, publicará *La ciudad de vapor*, un volumen de relatos cortos, algunos inéditos y otros ya publicados en diarios y revistas de prestigio como *El País*, el *New York Times* o *La Vanguardia*. Si hacemos caso a uno de sus personajes principales, Daniel Sempere, “*un libro es un espejo y solo podemos encontrar en él lo que ya llevamos dentro*”. Nos queda la pena de no poder seguir mirándonos en los reflejos futuros del espejo de un Carlos Ruiz Zafón que en estos tiempos de tecnología punta fue capaz de parir el ¿último? gran milagro editorial de la literatura española.