



Bulletin of Advanced Spanish

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¡Bienvenidos al Boletín de Primavera de 2026!

The skies over Venezuela have been abuzz with helicopters, escorting television documentary crews in and deposed dictators out.



Venezuela's predicament has given us some intriguing storylines to develop in this edition: how Venezuela's future might come down to a rivalry over the Nobel Peace Prize and a contest between two leading women [in Spanish]; why China (diplomatically) and the US (militarily) both deployed 'on the

[ground' in Caracas](#) in the final hours of the Maduro dictatorship; and how [Michael Palin's reflections on Venezuela's 'inexplicable' decline](#) led him unwittingly into García Márquez territory, encountering some great sights and curious locals along the way.



Elsewhere in Latin America we celebrate Buenos Aires' multi-faceted personality through two distinct perspectives on the city – one looking at the ever-controversial city-centre shantytown [Villa 31](#) [in Spanish], the other plugging into the city's cultural heritage as reflected in [Buenos Aires today](#).

On the other side of the cordillera, we re-visit the [cueca sola](#) dance, used under the Pinochet dictatorship to protest and grieve over disappeared friends and relatives – and made famous beyond Chile's borders through Sting's They dance alone / Ellas danzan solas.



Richard Gott, a friend of this publication, would have loved to read the articles mentioned above. We look at his audacious life – from Winchester to western imperialism, García Márquez to The Guardian and Che to Chávez – as one of the UK’s most committed Latin Americanists, and a prolific writer on the region.



Back in Spain, the year-long commemoration of 50 years since the end of Franco is now over – but what of the monarchy that followed, and how important was it to securing the freedom just celebrated? We look at the Bourbons’ first fifty years back on the throne.



Last year marked the centenary of Spanish writer Ana María Matute's birth: we look at [her legacy](#) [in Spanish], and analyse two of her short stories ([La conciencia](#) [in Spanish] and [Pecado de omisión](#)).

We also dip into a different type of cultural medium as we discover how Spanish and Latin American history and folklore have inspired the creators of [tabletop role-playing games in the Spanish-speaking world](#).

In this edition we also offer a [Bulletin Behind-the-Scenes](#) insight into some of the thinking that goes into preparing an edition of this free, online resource, which is read on every continent, and is written by and for enthusiasts at all stages of their exploration of the language and culture of the Spanish-speaking world. Might you like to join our team?

Please see the Guidelines tab if you would like to write for us. Articles for our Summer edition should please reach us by 25 April 2026.

¡Disfruten!

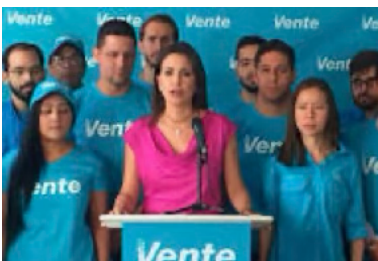


Venezuela: el último desafío de María Corina

Clara Riveros conversa con Andrés Cañizález, periodista e investigador venezolano, doctor en Ciencia Política por la Universidad Simón Bolívar de Caracas, respecto al Premio Nobel de Paz otorgado a María Corina Machado y a los eventos recientes acaecidos en Venezuela.

María Corina Machado, quien ha sido galardonada con el Premio Nobel de la Paz en 2025, nació en Venezuela en 1967, estudió ingeniería y finanzas y tuvo una trayectoria corta en el sector empresarial. Al momento de conocer la noticia del premio, residía en su país clandestinamente. La líder política opositora recibió el Nobel de la Paz por mantener “encendida la llama de la democracia en medio de una creciente oscuridad”.

En 1992, Machado fundó la Fundación Atenea, que trabaja en beneficio de los niños de la calle en Caracas. Diez años después, fue una de las fundadoras de Súmate, organización que promueve elecciones libres y justas y ha realizado capacitaciones y monitoreo electoral. En 2010, fue elegida para la Asamblea Nacional, obteniendo un número récord de votos. El régimen la expulsó del cargo en 2014.



Machado lidera el partido opositor Vente Venezuela y en 2017 ayudó a fundar la alianza Soy Venezuela, que une a las fuerzas prodemocráticas del país, superando las divisiones políticas. En 2023, anunció su candidatura a la presidencia de cara a las elecciones de 2024. La dictadura de Nicolás

Maduro le impidió presentarse y, entonces, decidió apoyar al candidato alternativo de la oposición, Edmundo González Urrutia. La oposición se movilizó ampliamente y recopiló documentación sistemática que confirmaba su victoria en las elecciones, pero el régimen chavista se declaró vencedor de los comicios y se aferró al control del poder.

Machado ha liderado la lucha por la democracia “frente al creciente autoritarismo en Venezuela,” se extrae de la página web del Premio Nobel. Allí también se explica por qué le fue concedido el Premio: “por su incansable labor en la promoción de los derechos democráticos del pueblo venezolano y por su lucha por lograr una transición justa y pacífica de la dictadura a la democracia”. “La Sra. Machado recibe el Premio Nobel de la Paz, ante todo, por sus esfuerzos por impulsar la democracia en Venezuela”, puntualiza la organización.

CLARA RIVEROS: ¿Cómo se recibió la noticia del Premio Nobel para María Corina Machado en Venezuela? ¿Qué significado ha tenido este reconocimiento para los venezolanos?



ANDRÉS CAÑIZÁLEZ: Han pasado tantas cosas que pareciera que lo de María Corina, el Premio Nobel, fue hace mucho tiempo. Creo que cuando se dio a conocer la noticia, primero, hubo mucha sorpresa. Aquí, en Venezuela, mucha gente no se lo creía. Estoy participando con varios periodistas en iniciativas de verificación, de fact checking, y nos escribieron preguntándonos si el anuncio era fake news. Entonces, la noticia, causó mucha sorpresa, fue algo totalmente inesperado, pero bien recibido por la gente, por el campo social, excluyendo al chavismo que las encuestas ubican en torno a un 15%, esa sería la gente de ‘patria o muerte’ con el chavismo.

Pero creo que en el grueso de la población fue bien recibido y reflató a María Corina. Después de las elecciones de 2024, pasó muchos meses limitada en

su accionar y prácticamente en la clandestinidad. En Venezuela ha habido muchísimas detenciones en el último año y medio, fundamentalmente de personas que habían sido testigos electorales o activistas, testigos de mesa o activistas electorales.



Mucha gente fue detenida, pero no eran líderes políticos, los detuvieron porque algún vecino los delató indicando que habían estado cuidando los votos o recopilando actas, etcétera. El Premio, de alguna manera, le devolvió visibilidad a esa gesta ciudadana protagonizada por Machado o que tiene en Machado a la figura visible, pero esta no ha sido una acción individual. Sí logró catalizar una dinámica muy importante en ese año 2024, que no sólo fue votar sino toda la épica que hubo alrededor. No hay otra manera de definirlo. Los ciudadanos —a pesar del chavismo y del régimen que se negó a reconocer los resultados en las urnas—, la acción ciudadana logró recopilar casi un 83% de las actas electorales que permitieron corroborar y demostrar que las elecciones en general fueron fraudulentas. Y todo esto ocurría mientras que el gobierno reprimía a la gente.



Las figuras más relevantes del equipo de Machado tuvieron que irse al exilio, pero también hay detenidos, una buena parte de la estructura de base está encarcelada. Entonces, María Corina ha sido la figura central, pero hay mucha gente involucrada para que todo esto sucediera y eso es lo que el Nobel ha reconocido. Cuando vas al mensaje del 10 de octubre, cuando se da a conocer la decisión de que le van a dar el Nobel a María Corina, se está reconociendo cómo esta mujer catalizó, galvanizó esa alma ciudadana que quería un cambio, que quería un cambio en democracia, a través del voto.

Que le hayan otorgado el premio la catapultó otra vez a la escena política, luego de un periodo de ostracismo obligado por su propia seguridad. El Premio Nobel enaltecó a María Corina y arroja de nuevo luces sobre la gesta ciudadana de los venezolanos y la cruda represión que se ha vivido y que siguió a las elecciones de 2024. Es un homenaje al pueblo venezolano que no sólo puso el entusiasmo, sino que después vivió la oscuridad de la represión y todavía hoy la está viviendo.

C.R.: La noticia del Premio Nobel agitó la política ya no solo a nivel interno...

A.C.: La concesión del Nobel coincidió con todo lo que la administración Trump venía montando desde el mes de agosto en el Mar Caribe y que se vislumbraba como algún tipo de acción militar en el futuro cercano.

C.R.: Un comentario y un capítulo aparte ha sido toda la odisea de Machado para ir a recibir su reconocimiento...

A.C.: Ella estaba no totalmente oculta, pero sí en la semiclandestinidad por razones de seguridad. El chavismo quizá no hizo el esfuerzo por detenerla, pero tampoco le permitió moverse libremente. Machado no podía salir a una

calle y convocar a una manifestación. Cuando se le otorga el Nobel, entre octubre y noviembre, se genera un debate respecto a si María Corina debe ir o no a buscar el premio. El fiscal general, una persona muy afín al régimen, dijo que Machado es una prófuga de la justicia, eso significaba que cualquier cuerpo de seguridad debía detenerla y todo esto añadió más tensión a la situación.



Pensé, lo escribí, y lo sigo pensando, a la luz de lo que ha ocurrido, que María Corina no tendría que haberse ido de Venezuela. Recopilé información sobre otros premios Nobel de la Paz que han estado encarcelados o impedidos de ir a recibir el Premio Nobel. [La hija de Machado recibió el Premio, ya que María Corina no pudo llegar para el día de la ceremonia – Ed] Políticamente fue un error que Machado se fuera de Venezuela. Ahora vemos a figuras políticas de menor relieve que ella y que estuvieron clandestinas por muchos años o meses que han reaparecido. Para mí la presencia de María Corina en Venezuela hubiese sido mucho más estratégica en la situación que estamos viviendo. Al salir del país, ella logró el espaldarazo de la comunidad internacional, pero perdió capacidad de actuar e incidir políticamente en este momento que vive Venezuela.

C.R.: ¿Cómo interpreta la reacción del presidente Trump frente al Premio Nobel que recibió María Corina Machado?

El jefe de la Casa Blanca se empeñó con el tema del Nobel y de que era él quien lo merecía por terminar, según él, ocho guerras o más. Generó una situación tan tensa que María Corina Machado optó por entregarle su medalla del Nobel diciéndole que la merece por hacer la paz a través de la fuerza. Ese acto de condescendencia, de Machado hacía Trump, cayó muy mal en Noruega. Trump quedó feliz por unas horas, cesó el ninguneo que había tenido hacía Machado, incluso dijo que le gustaría verla desempeñando algún rol en la transición y no ha vuelto a decir que es una figura que no tiene el respaldo ni el respeto para liderar una transición frente a la ‘fantástica’ y colaboradora presidenta interina...



A.C.: María Corina Machado fue pragmática para lograr la atención de Trump, otorgándole la medalla del Nobel. Creo que ella apostó a sacrificar su premio, pensando en su lucha y, como buena política que es, en su anhelo de alcanzar el poder, es lo que se observa a simple vista. Machado, como otras figuras emblemáticas de la política, despierta amores y odios, incluso odios viscerales. Pero, como cualquier persona, es un ser humano, pudo equivocarse en algunas decisiones.

Volviendo a la participación política de María Corina en la transición, lo que se dice es tan genérico, respecto a que va a tener algún papel en la transición, que la coloca en un rol bastante secundario.

C.R.: Desde el 3 de enero, tras la operación estadounidense que facilitó la captura y extracción de Nicolás Maduro, he oído al Presidente Trump mencionar más veces la palabra petróleo que democracia. Inevitablemente, me asalta el temor: si el régimen colabora y se muestra diligente con los requerimientos de la Casa Blanca, ¿la administración Trump se acomodará a una larga temporada con el chavismo? ¿Cuál es su opinión a este respecto?

A.C.: El chavismo y, en particular, Delcy Rodríguez, ha sido también muy pragmática en captar la atención de Trump, pero con el tema de los negocios. Esta semana, por ejemplo, se aprobó la reforma de la Ley de Hidrocarburos. Esto coloca al gobierno interino respondiendo directo y rápido a lo que pide Estados Unidos.

C.R.: Y, entonces, ¿en qué queda la transición?

A.C.: Ese es el gran riesgo. Lo pienso desde el día uno. Todo lo que ha dicho el Presidente Trump está orientado a los negocios. Esta semana Marco Rubio fue más claro durante su intervención ante el Senado, reiterando que el fin último de todo esto es la democracia. Pero, si me quedo con las palabras del Presidente, Trump está pensando en los negocios, las inversiones, las petroleras, etcétera. Esto nos coloca ante un gran riesgo y es que el cambio sea netamente económico para tener una sociedad abierta a la inversión extranjera y a una economía netamente extractivista, sin que se trastoque el estatus quo político.

La sociedad está muy fracturada y fragmentada por los efectos de la represión de 2024 y 2025. Entré a un salón de clase hace dos días y le pregunté a los jóvenes: ¿Quiénes estarían dispuestos a salir a protestar a la calle para pedir que haya democracia o que haya elecciones? De los 20 jóvenes que estaban ahí no hubo nadie. Dijeron: 'Queremos que haya democracia, pero, si salimos a la calle, nos van a meter presos'. Ese es el clima actual para la movilización social en el país. El liderazgo político en Venezuela debe volver a tomar las calles y hacer la exigencia de democracia y elecciones.



C.R.: Una periodista venezolana comentaba que hay medios estadounidenses que están hablando de la 'moderada' y 'pragmática' Delcy. Pero Delcy siempre ha estado ahí, desde los primeros días del chavismo, y es parte del régimen, de las torturas y de las violaciones a los derechos humanos. Algunos dicen que el futuro de Venezuela hoy se juega frente a 'dos liderazgos femeninos'. El planteo, en esos términos, hace ruido, descoloca. ¿Se puede situar en el mismo lugar a María Corina Machado y a Delcy Rodríguez?

A.C.: Hay un proceso importante de lavado de imagen para decir que Delcy no estuvo vinculada a las cosas más álgidas del pasado. El chavismo rápidamente está recomponiéndose. Vi fotos de cómo están pintando paredes con flores y el nombre de Delcy, cambiando los mensajes y vallas guerreristas de Maduro...

C.R.: ¿Asistimos ahora a una operación cosmética para presentar a una Delcy pacifista?

A.C.: Hay mucho dinero inyectándose desde el Estado para lavarle la cara a Delcy Rodríguez. El chavismo más político, no el militar represivo, que después de Maduro se quiere replantear un referente para seguir existiendo como fuerza política, va a tener a Delcy Rodríguez como referente.



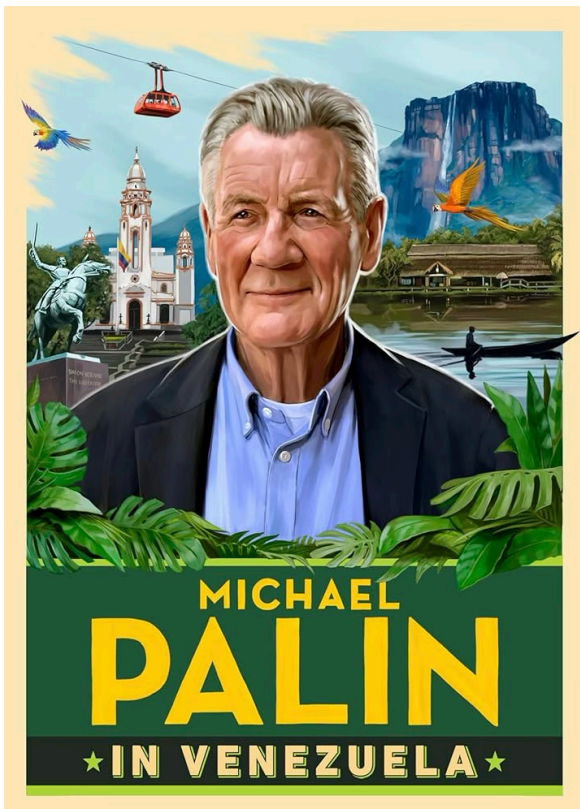
No creo que podamos equiparar a María Corina Machado y a Delcy Rodríguez, pero si tú me dijeras: si hay elecciones en Venezuela, ¿quiénes serían los candidatos? Sin duda alguna el chavismo se la va a tener que jugar con Delcy. Y la figura de la oposición será María Corina Machado. En el momento en que se celebren elecciones en Venezuela, va a ser una cosa inédita tener a dos candidatas mujeres. Creo que hacía eso vamos.



Venezuela: the land that shouldn't be
BAS Senior Editor Robin Wallis

It is February 2025, and Sir Michael Palin and his film crew are in Venezuela to explore one of South America's best resourced but most troubled nations.

Barefoot on a slippery ledge a few metres behind the thunderous torrent of the Canaima Falls in Venezuela's Amazon region, the beaming presenter clings to a rocky overhang and hollers to camera, "I'm 81 – I shouldn't be here!"



"Shouldn't be" is in effect the mantra of Palin's Venezuela project – a three-week expedition which has yielded a 3-part television series broadcast in the UK on Channel 5¹, and the beautifully presented travel journal In Venezuela published by Penguin².

Having risen to fame as a member of the Monty Python comedy team in the late 1960s, Palin has been a travel documentary presenter on British

television since the 1980s. Like Sir David Attenborough in the natural world, Sir Michael's pedigree as a traveller is such that viewers know to trust his judgement. After 25 years roaming the earth for the BBC, since 2018 he has made a series of shorter documentaries for ITN Productions. The destinations chosen (North Korea, Iraq, Nigeria) have been more challenging than in his earlier days. At an age when most people are looking for familiar certainties, Sir Michael is not shy of asking probing questions about his surroundings and the forces that shape the societies he visits. A telling moment in the documentary comes when Sir Michael laments on voice-over that Venezuela shouldn't be such a difficult place to visit or to relax in. At the end of his journal he concludes that Venezuela's predicament (in 2025) is 'inexplicable'.



This judgement may reflect Palin's notoriously benevolent personality. His viewers may be less charitable, shouting back at their television sets that the explanation is obvious: Latin America's caudillo culture (strong-man rule through violence and intimidation), an elite that has historically prioritised its own interests above the common good, a politicised judicial system that undermines the rule of law, and 'state capture' by what Chávez's opponents called the *boligarquía* (a pun on Chávez's fanciful claim to be the political heir to 19th century Venezuelan Liberator Simón Bolívar). Plus the Bolivarian regime's semi-covert alliances with the masters of repression in states such as Cuba, Iran, Russia and others, where periodic culling of political opponents is standard practice for rulers who wish to stay in power forever.



García Márquez aficionados may find Palin's 'inexplicable' remark reminiscent of *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* / *Chronicle of a death foretold*, the García Márquez novel that perhaps reveals more about Latin American culture and society than any other published work. Twenty-seven

years after an inexplicable tragedy, the Chronicle's narrator struggles to 'reassemble the broken mirror of memory from so many scattered shards³' and make sense of the event. So too Michael Palin arrives in Venezuela some 27 years after Chávez first won the presidency, trying to understand what has brought about the country's ruin. Palin muses on what might have been as he wanders through the semi-abandoned oil capital of Maracaibo, and surveys the devastation of Los Llanos' illegal gold mines – scenes comparable in tone to García Márquez's narrator hunting for the judge's report in the flooded public records office in Riohacha⁴. Some Venezuelans speak openly to Sir Michael. Others have to be edited out to protect their identities. All the while the shadow of the police state hangs over the journey – most notably when Palin and his team are informally detained when visiting Chávez's home town of Sabaneta.



Palin's comic sensibilities help to remind us that dictators can also be absurd. We chuckle with him at Maduro and his wife portrayed as giant inflatables of the kind typically found outside US car dealerships, or as carnival floats, or in an airline's in-flight comic depicting the president as Superbigote (to Maduro's fans, a type of Superman; to Palin, an unintended pun on the term 'bigot'; and to Spanish speakers, a reminder that Maduro's moustache (bigote) seems for him to have somehow become part of his entitlement to rule).⁵ The journal reveals that Palin's detention in Sabaneta was ended partly as a result of his captors finding on YouTube the fish-slapping dance from Monty Python, performed by Palin and John Cleese – proof that Sir Michael couldn't be all bad after all. Just as visitors to Costa Rica are immersed in the country's pura vida culture, so one of Sir Michael's local fixers explains to him that in Venezuela life reflects the dichotomy of tensa calma. From the outset Sir Michael is struck by the uneasy security situation and the regime's omnipresence. He commendably focuses on what it is like for Venezuelans

to live under such despotism, speaking to families divided by exile and young people unable to express their aspirations.



Given Maduro's fateful encounter with the US Delta Force just under a year after Palin's visit, you might imagine that In Venezuela has been overtaken by events. Conversely, you could argue that the toppling of Maduro has made Palin's observations all the more significant as an insight into a society desperate for change, yet one where – owing to the quashing of free elections and other civil rights – people have been unable to express their needs.⁶

Palin makes a persuasive case that Venezuela will be worth visiting as/when it emerges from dictatorship. He finds unspoiled coastal communities, spectacular scenery and some inspiring affirmations of the human spirit – notably, the Project Alcatraz programme to rehabilitate violent offenders through rugby, run by an altruistic rum distillery owner whose premises had been targeted by criminals.

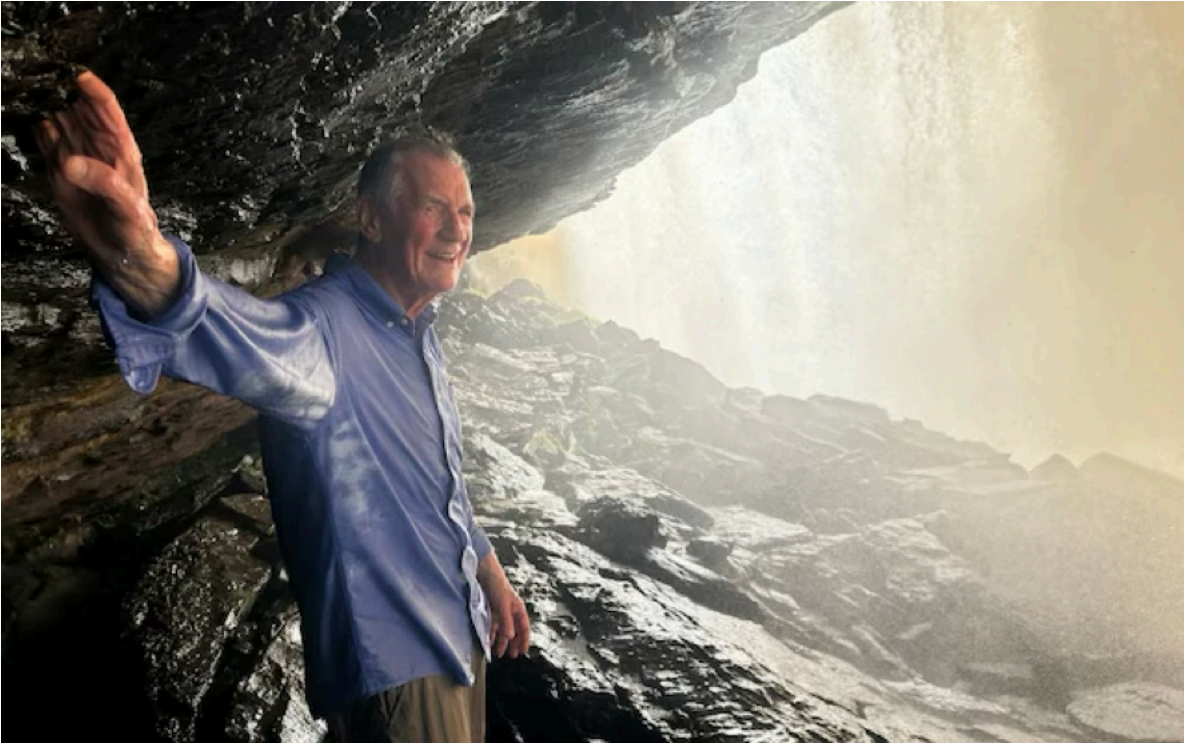
If you have time for only the documentary or the journal....



The TV visuals vividly convey how hazardous some of the journey was, the sense of threat, the characters of Sir Michael's interlocutors, his disarming way of ingratiating himself with local people and the telegenic nature of his wit (eg his announcement to camera that the Caribbean beach he was visiting was so idyllic that he had decided to retire from film-making there and then, so the camera crew could all b***er off).

The journal offers some fuller and more nuanced insights than we find in the documentary. The author and publishers have shrewdly assessed the reading public's appetite for / tolerance of detail about faraway places, and have duly kept the journal to 20,000 words. They have also worked out that a large proportion of their readership is likely to appreciate the easy-on-the-eye font, generous line-spacing and sumptuous photographs. Sir Michael is a champion of the Third Age not just in being able to scramble over slippery rocks in his eighties.

One thing is certain: touring Venezuela without a production company budget to protect you from the privations suffered by regular citizens would be a risky and probably disagreeable experience. Or so it was under Maduro. Now that Venezuela is 'run by' the US government, that should change... shouldn't it?



1. <https://www.channel5.com/show/michael-palin-in-venezuela> ↩
2. Whether Palin or his distinguished publishers were consciously echoing the title of Bruce Chatwin's seminal 1977 classic *In Patagonia*, the two works are quite different genres: illustrated travel journal (Palin) / travel literature (Chatwin). ↩
3. recomponer con tantas astillas dispersas el espejo roto de la memoria – *Crónica* chapter 1 ↩
4. During his Venezuela trip Palin is reading García Márquez's novel *El General en su laberinto*, which depicts Bolívar's withdrawal into exile, driven by disillusionment with the self-interest of local elites in places like Caracas. (Bolívar died before he could board ship.) ↩
5. cf Fidel Castro's trademark beard in the Cuban revolution – so potent a symbol that the CIA at one point instigated a (failed) plot to make said beard fall out. ↩
6. Maduro lost the 2024 presidential election, but lied about the result to claim victory, forcibly oppressing opposition protests.



When Monroe meets China: A New Geopolitics?

BAS Editor Stephen Hart

President Trump's re-making of the world got 2026 underway with a bang this year.



On 3 January, in a surreal 'VIP-in-pyjamas' grab, the U.S. Navy kidnapped the President of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro, and his wife Cilia Flores and flew them to New York, where they were charged with crimes relating to drug-trafficking, money-laundering and international terrorism.

At first sight, the event appeared to be an implementation of the Monroe Doctrine articulated by President James Monroe in 1823 to deter European powers from meddling in the Americas:



“With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered and shall not interfere. But with the governments who have declared their independence and maintained it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration and on just principles, acknowledged, we could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any other manner their destiny, by any European power in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States.1”

The US incursion into Venezuela can be understood in terms of this Doctrine. After all, Russia (a European power) was helping the Maduro regime stay in power.

However, there are additional factors at play here, as signalled by Donald Trump’s invention of the new term, the “Donroe Doctrine” – Donroe being a fusion of the Monroe Doctrine with Donald Trump’s policy of asserting “American predominance in the Western hemisphere”2.



'Donroe' also entails a new US approach to global maritime power, including "policing" the high seas. Thus, on 8 January 2026, U.S. forces impounded a rogue vessel in the Atlantic Ocean: "US forces swooped by helicopter and boarded the *Marinera* – now empty, but accused of sanction-busting oil deliveries from Iran and previously linked to illegal Venezuelan oil shipments". [3](#)



The arrest of Nicolás Maduro on 3 January 2026 has been compared to a similar operation that occurred in mid-December 1989 when US President George H.W. Bush ordered his troops to invade Panama and depose President Manuel Noriega. Coincidentally, Noriega surrendered on 3 January 1990, that is, exactly 36 years before Maduro was kidnapped.[4](#) The motivation was similar – Noriega was accused, like Maduro, of drug-trafficking – but in 2026 there is one major difference: China.

Whereas China was hardly on the horizon in 1989, by 2026 China had become a major trading partner and political ally of a number of Latin American countries. Trade volume between China and Latin America grew 26-fold between 2000 and 2020, and some economists expect it to more than double by 2035, which means it will exceed the level of \$700 billion”.[5](#) This has led to a heightening of tension between China and the U.S., with “specific implications for Latin America as well – a region historically influenced by the United States, which is now increasingly present in China’s economic orbit.”[6](#)



It is ironic, indeed, that just a few hours before the US raid on Caracas, Maduro had met an official delegation from China led by Qiu Xiaoyi, Beijing’s special representative for Latin American affairs. At the meeting both leaders re-affirmed the importance of continuing strategic ties between China and Venezuela, while committing to build a “multipolar world of development and peace”.⁷ Commenting on the meeting the next day, President Trump remarked “I have a very good relationship with Xi, and there’s not going to be a problem. They’re going to get oil.”⁸

The struggle between China and the US for the minds and the markets of Latin America has spanned the last 15 years or so. In some ways the US strike on Venezuela can be seen as the ratcheting-up of the trade war between the two powers that came to a head when the Port of Chancay was opened in Peru (14 November 2024). Barely a month later, President Trump – stung into action by what he perceived as a threat to the US’s trade relations with Latin America – accused China of trying to take control of the Panama Canal, and threatened to “take it back”. As a result, Panama agreed to withdraw its membership of China’s Belt and Road initiative, which it had signed up to in 2017.⁹

It is also striking that Trump has justified his push to acquire Greenland in terms of resisting Chinese (and Russian) expansion into the western hemisphere – a further indication that the 21st century Donroe Doctrine, unlike the 19th century Monroe Doctrine, is mainly about China.



One other factor should be mentioned. Recent research in the field of genomics has suggested a close similarity between the DNA of indigenous peoples of Latin America and those of Asia, including China. Archaeological research has proposed that the Chinese may have travelled to the Americas before Christopher Columbus. Some historians have suggested that the Fusang of Ancient China may have been the place nowadays known as the Yucatan Peninsula. Museologists have pointed to a similarity between the culture of the Mayas and that of ancient China.¹⁰ The evidence is not incontrovertible, but it does suggest that new ways of looking at the world are emerging.

Are we seeing the birth of a radically new geopolitics?

1. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Monroe-Doctrine> ↩
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donroe_Doctrine ↩
3. Gergana Krasteva, “Trump Seizes Tankers in New Show of Force: Splash & grab”, The Metro (6 January 2026), p. 5. ↩
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Apuntes del fin del mundo: modern musings on Buenos Aires

Soraya Shakibi

Buenos Aires is a site of confluence. Between European facades, literary phantoms and the city's raw, present-day contradictions, it reveals itself as both a setting and a character in an unstable yet strangely familiar novella. This column wanders its streets and myths, tracing the tension between the imagined past and the realities encountered, and the stories of Argentines themselves.

I had no idea what to expect of Buenos Aires. The disconnect between the gushing prose of the travel guides, with their glossy photographs of reassuringly European landmarks, and the hermetic, sinister vision suggested in the novels I had read, pulsed in my head like the turbulence as we crossed the coast of Brazil. Having arrived across 'a sea that was five moons wide', to quote Borges, I wondered which incarnation was right as I stepped out of Ezeiza airport into the dawn air on one of the coldest August winter days the capital had ever known.



The streets of Buenos Aires draw you in like a maze. After realising that my aim of walking every street in the city would take a life-time, I resorted to dawdling. This also became demoralising: from what I saw, and contrary to what most guidebooks insist, I initially found it hard to believe that Buenos Aires was the ‘Paris of the South’. There is very much a Latin American reality at play: high-rise buildings, insurmountable inflation, shacks and villas miseria scattered across the city and outskirts. The splendour of Retiro, parks designed by Carlos Thays and the Plaza San Martín are only a small snapshot of a glorified past. I began to realise that the architectural heritage was not merely physical, but psychological, functioning as a portal through which identity, status and better times were both conjured and sustained, the *pasado ilusorio* of Borges’ *Fundación Mítica de Buenos Aires*.

Contemporary Argentine literature has portrayed the city as ephemeral, evanescent and slippery – a chimera whose landscape is unstable, mutable and untrustworthy. In [‘The Tango Singer’](#), by journalist-writer Tomás Eloy Martínez, the protagonist Bruno Cadogan observes,

‘I had hallucinations in which photos of early twentieth-century Buenos Aires would superimpose themselves on images of reality. I would lean out the balcony of my room and, instead of the vulgar buildings across the street, I’d see the terrace of Gath and Chaves, a shop that disappeared from Florida Street forty years ago’.



I can't help thinking that Argentina's failure has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Take a look at [Edificio 'No Hi Ha Somnis Impossibles'](#). It seems ironic that such a quote was emblazoned on the building in 1999, after it was restored to a somewhat less dilapidated state. You only have to look at the building to see that it is completely parodic. This 'Paris of the South' is the chamuyo of the city's lunfardo slang – a deceit, a fraud.

The fascination with the architectural language of Paris, mostly Beaux-Arts, had its roots in the fin-de-siècle when more mansions per family were built in Buenos Aires than anywhere else in the world. Such vestiges of the past have been a double-edged sword for porteños: something they are so proud of, yet have been unable to sustain.

There is pointless symbolism in architecture, too. For example, [El Palacio Barolo](#) is an intricate allegory of Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy. Its 22 floors represent the 22 stanzas of each canto, while the edifice's three sections (Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise) mirror the poem's structure.



Not only has architecture been of great importance to this city, but also theatre, opera and film. One only needs to look at [El Teatro Colón](#) to see the impression of the European opera tradition. Here lies the porteños' indifference to their Latin American identity and disengagement with the

continent's development and welfare. They have instead looked north-east towards Europe, their historical and largely demographic origin. Buenos Aires functions as both landscape and character, its slippery, serpentine nature complicated further still by a reliance on facade and show – Europe-facing – and by the years of Dirty War and truth-subverting dictatorship.



The actor Ricardo Darín (think younger Anthony Hopkins) is a recurring guest on our Netflix's 'recently watched' – to my flatmate's utter horror ("Is he the only actor in the whole of Argentina?"). Admittedly, he is one of the most versatile. If an Argentine were to walk into our flat, I'm sure they'd sit down, kick off their shoes, and join us for a Darín sesh. Well, we certainly can't invite Argentines over if our toilet isn't flushing... or can we? It hasn't been working for a while now: in fact, most toilets in the city have duct tape and papel higiénico embellishing bowl, valve, handle and tank. How Buenos Aires became a toilet cemetery I'm not sure, but all I know is that they are not in a hurry to fix them.



The schism between a dysfunctional present and the excesses of an extravagant past is nowhere more visible than in the [Palacio de Aguas Corrientes](#) – a fabulous, fairy-tale confection of a building, an 1887 water pumping station dolled up in typical porteño style as a palace, complete with Royal Doulton glazed tiles. I am sure that the British and Scandinavian

engineers who built it never envisioned a day when it would house toilet pans through the ages whilst every toilet in the city blocked quicker than a tango cross-step.

Another idiosyncrasy of Argentine society is the dissemination of news reports. Forget concerned broadsheet editorials about appeasement in the face of Putin: the news here is delivered by orange people dripping in sponsorship jewellery, making gauche comments in garish outfits. The reports are even more concerning: murder after murder, tacky jewellery adverts, and “LATEST: Philanthropist Kevin Costner frees seal” ... wouldn't Lao Tzu be proud?



It makes you wonder where Argentine priorities lie. Does the war in Gaza matter? What about starving children in Ukraine? I would even be happy with a short sequence on what Trump is up to. It's clear to see that Argentines are living in a silo of their own. Expatriates hypothesise that, because Argentines have never trusted the system they see around them, they instead resort to idealising the past. That old Roman chestnut 'pan et circenses' comes to mind – feed the masses, thus silencing them. The lack of decent, germane news sources encourages this trifling and madcap reporting. It feeds the narrative of everlasting splendour and dignity on the continent, yet fails to look at its own gnarly reflection in the mirror.

Some days I feel very much at the bottom of the world.

Adapted from the version first published by [The Cambridge Language Collective](#) in November 2025



La reforma de la Villa 31: ¿humanitarismo o intervención desconectada?

Zhengyu Zhang

Durante la década de 1930, en plena Gran Depresión, grupos de trabajadores migrantes, entre ellos europeos recién llegados al país y migrantes internos provenientes de provincias argentinas, comenzaron a instalarse en terrenos ferroviarios y portuarios del barrio de Retiro, en Buenos Aires.

No fueron los primeros inmigrantes europeos en llegar a la ciudad, que llevaba décadas recibiendo oleadas migratorias, pero sí fueron de los primeros en asentarse precariamente en esa zona específica, dando origen a un núcleo que más tarde sería conocido como la Villa 31. Hablaban distintas lenguas (español, italiano, ruso) y compartían la búsqueda de empleo y vivienda accesible en la capital. Con el tiempo, la llegada de nuevas familias consolidó una comunidad donde el ruido de los trenes se mezcló con saludos multilingües, gritos en lunfardo y mate amargo.



Así surgió lo que entonces se llamó la “Villa Desocupación”, un asentamiento informal que, a lo largo de las décadas, se transformó en una de las villas más emblemáticas de América Latina. Hoy, más de cuarenta mil personas conviven en un entramado denso de pasillos, viviendas autoconstruidas y una vida barrial vibrante, pero también atraviesan desafíos estructurales vinculados a la pobreza, la inseguridad y la falta histórica de servicios básicos.

Un rasgo central de la Villa 31 es su ubicación estratégica y altamente visible dentro de la ciudad. El barrio se encuentra en Retiro, a pocos metros de algunas de las zonas más modernas, comerciales y adineradas de la capital, incluyendo distritos financieros, torres corporativas y desarrollos inmobiliarios de alto valor. Además, está junto a nodos clave de transporte urbano y nacional, como las principales estaciones de tren y de autobuses de la ciudad, por donde transitan diariamente miles de personas. Esta cercanía extrema entre riqueza, infraestructura moderna y pobreza estructural convierte a la Villa 31 en un símbolo urbano particularmente potente y en un foco constante de tensiones políticas, económicas y sociales.

El impacto de la inflación, que supera sistemáticamente el crecimiento nominal de los salarios, erosiona el poder adquisitivo de sus habitantes.

“Dos años atrás verías a un montón de gente comiendo parrillita en la calle... pero ahora nadie tiene dinero para comprar carne”, señala Magdalena Bazán, residente desde hace 35 años. (Mota, 2019)



Frente a esta situación, el gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires ha impulsado en los últimos años un ambicioso proyecto de urbanización, con una inversión estimada en más de 500 millones de dólares para integrar la villa como un barrio formal (Briones & Ortiz, 2025). Las obras incluyen la construcción de viviendas nuevas de cuatro o cinco pisos, mejoras en el tendido eléctrico, cloacas y agua potable, junto con nuevos espacios públicos. (Oliva, 2022)

Las autoridades describen la iniciativa como un “enfoque holístico” orientado a abordar la “pobreza estructural”, más allá de los ingresos (Giambartolomei, 2022). Formalmente, el objetivo se presenta como humanitario: garantizar condiciones dignas, seguridad y acceso a servicios

esenciales. Sin embargo, el programa ha generado un rechazo significativo entre parte de la comunidad.



Para muchos vecinos, el problema radica en la desconfianza acumulada por décadas de promesas incumplidas, desalojos, cambios de política y estigmatización. Guillermo Torre, referente de programas juveniles contra las adicciones, lo resume así: “A la gente no le parece mal que el gobierno venga a intervenir. El problema es que llegan con una idea fija de lo que quieren hacer y no hablan con la gente. La gente no se siente escuchada”. Entre los ejemplos más citados se encuentran intervenciones estatales percibidas como autoritarias o desconsideradas, como el caso del mural infantil criticado por autoridades por supuesta ‘apropiación’ del espacio. (Rollenhagen, 2019)

Otro punto crítico es la relocalización obligatoria a los nuevos complejos. Muchas familias están habituadas a casas horizontales, no a departamentos; dependen de pequeños comercios instalados en sus viviendas – almacenes, parrillas, peluquerías – que podrían desaparecer con el traslado. Además, algunos vecinos han señalado fallas constructivas en los nuevos edificios. (Oliva, 2022)

Todo esto revive el temor a una posible expulsión encubierta, un temor alimentado por experiencias previas de intentos de erradicación. Para parte de la comunidad, la urbanización se percibe menos como una inclusión genuina y más como una intervención diseñada desde afuera, sin incorporar su voz ni su identidad barrial.



Este conflicto recuerda a la teoría del derecho a la ciudad, de Henri Lefebvre, que subraya la importancia del poder colectivo de los habitantes en la producción del espacio urbano. Lefebvre crítica que las ciudades modernas se organicen bajo lógicas puramente económicas, donde suelo, servicios y vivienda se tratan como mercancías, y reivindica el derecho de las comunidades a participar activamente en la transformación de su propio territorio. (Lefebvre)

Aplicado a la Villa 31, esto implica que la urbanización no puede imponerse sin considerar las prácticas cotidianas, la economía popular y los vínculos sociales que sostienen la vida del barrio. La planificación urbana debería partir de mesas de participación reales, donde las prioridades las definan quienes habitan el territorio.

La Villa 31 significa cosas distintas según quién la mire: para algunos es deterioro y estigma; para otros, esfuerzo, trabajo y resiliencia. Ningún proyecto, por más bien intencionado, puede capturar toda su complejidad. Tal vez la única vía hacia una transformación justa sea el trabajo conjunto, donde Estado y vecinos construyan, literal y simbólicamente, un futuro compartido.



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¿Qué fue la cueca sola, y cuál era su significado?

Ella Clarke

Regresemos a una época cuando Chile vivía bajo la dictadura militar de Augusto Pinochet.



Entre 1973 y 1990 los derechos humanos y la expresión política en Chile fueron severamente violados. Imagina un tiempo cuando vecinos de tu comunidad fueron asesinados, o que fueras una de las 250.000 personas encarceladas, o una de las 40.000 víctimas de tortura¹; un tiempo cuando el periódico siempre apoyaba al gobierno, estando censurado e incapaz de decir la verdad.

Ahora, imagina que un miembro de tu familia había sido ‘desaparecido’ por el gobierno por estar en contra de la dictadura y los militares. Quizás tu ser querido estaba en uno de los 1.132 centros de detención secretos en Chile, pero nunca podías averiguarlo, porque tu ser querido fue una de las 3.000 personas que nunca regresaron¹. Esta fue la situación de miles de familias

de los desaparecidos en Chile. Muchos chilenos todavía desconocen dónde están sus hijos, esposos o amigos.



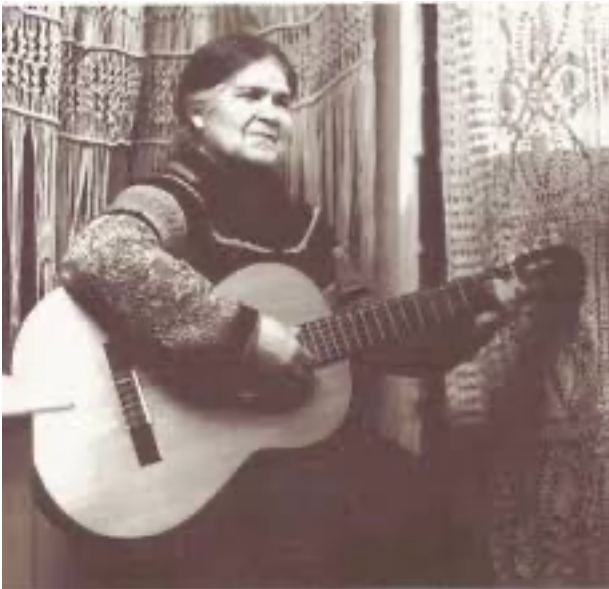
Y así nació el baile “la cueca sola”. La cueca es un típico baile chileno de parejas, con una mujer y un hombre bailando animados juntos. Pero para las familias de los desaparecidos, unidas bajo el lema de la Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (AFDD), la cueca sola representa un doloroso duelo.

Se originó como un canto Cueca sola interpretado por la música y activista chilena Gala Torres, con una letra corta pero impactante:

*En un tiempo fui dichosa
apacibles eran mis días,
mas llegó la desventura
perdí lo que más quería.*

*Me pregunto constante,
¿dónde te tienen?
Y nadie me responde,
y tú no vienes.
Y tú no vienes, mi alma,
larga es la ausencia,
y por toda la tierra
pido conciencia.
Sin ti, prenda querida,
triste es la vida.*

El uso de la frase “¿dónde te tienen?” muestra su frustración, pero también su desesperanza con la situación política. Es una referencia fugaz pero clara del papel de los militares y el gobierno en la desaparición de su marido. La tristeza que este canto produce es fuerte y profunda, con la última línea del canto siendo tan simple, pero al mismo tiempo tan emotiva y poderosa, enfatizando las fuertes emociones de estas mujeres, ilustrando que el canto fue la única manera de expresar sus sentimientos.



El 8 de marzo de 1978, Día Internacional de la Mujer, el AFDD hizo bailar por primera vez “la cueca sola” con el canto de Gala Torres. En una actuación profunda y significativa, las esposas de los desaparecidos mostraron su solidaridad entre sí con una distinción crucial: la mujer no tenía con quien bailar. En lugar de acompañar a su pareja, ella sostiene sobre su pecho una foto de su marido desaparecido. En ese momento el significado del baile “la cueca” se convirtió en algo animado y enérgico en la expresión de una tristeza insoportable. No fue una proclamación ruidosa, pero no necesitaba serlo. Tenía una calidad conmovedora que muchos sintieron no solo en Chile, sino que en el mundo entero.

Doce años después, el 13 de octubre de 1990, en celebración del retorno a la democracia, un concierto tuvo lugar en el estadio nacional. Y esa ocasión fue cuando el cantautor británico Sting cantó *Ellas danzan solas* (*They dance alone*), un tema suyo que se inspiraba en las mujeres y familiares de los desaparecidos. La canción – con una versión grabada en inglés y otra en español – llamó la atención de todo el mundo a los horrores y las injusticias que habían pasado en Chile durante el régimen de Pinochet. Su coro poderoso figurativamente resume la pérdida y el dolor que la gente de Chile había experimentado debido a la impunidad de la dictadura:

*Ellas danzan con los desaparecidos
Danzan con los muertos
Danzan con amores invisibles
Con silenciosa angustia, danzan con sus padres
Con sus hijos, danzan con sus esposos
Ellas danzan solas, danzan solas*

Aunque muchas de las mujeres que bailaron para protestar y expresar su dolor nunca volvieron a ver a los seres queridos con quienes bailaban en vida, mantuvieron la memoria de sus familiares desaparecidos a través de sus valientes protestas. Han mostrado que, cuando la gente se solidariza a través del baile y la música, puede tener un impacto, dado que, sin la determinación de estas mujeres, los 3.000 desaparecidos se habrían perdido para siempre, no solo físicamente sino también en nuestros recuerdos.



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From Che to Chávez: the life and extraordinary times of Richard Gott

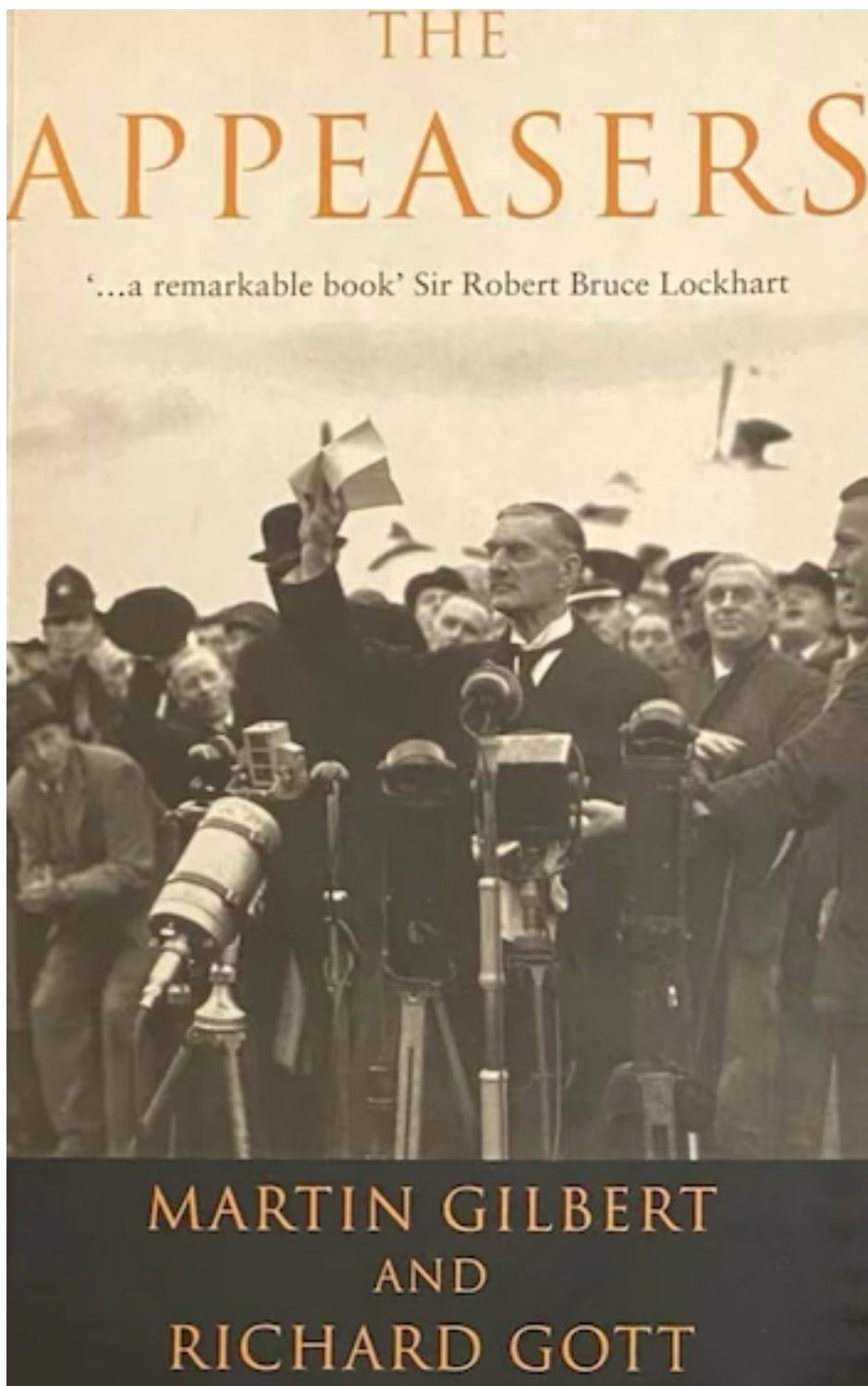
Colin Harding

Richard Gott, who died on 2 November 2025, aged 87, was an influential pioneer of British press coverage of Latin America at a time when there was little public interest in that vast and fascinating region.



Latin America would have a profound impact on all aspects of Richard Gott's life. He first made his mark in 1967, when he found himself called upon to identify the corpse of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara after the latter's execution by Bolivian government forces acting in collaboration with the CIA. When Che's body was brought to Vallegrande, a remote market town in the Bolivian lowlands, strapped to the runner of a military helicopter, Gott was in the area as the Guardian correspondent covering Che's ill-fated attempt to stir the local peasantry to insurrection. Having previously interviewed Che for a newspaper article, he was the only person on hand qualified to judge whether the cadaver was indeed that of the famed Argentine revolutionary.

Gott had first travelled to Latin America in 1966, when he was invited by Claudio Véliz, a Chilean historian and social scientist whom he had met at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) in London, to help him to set up the Instituto de Estudios Internacionales at the University of Chile in Santiago – an initiative partly funded by the British Council. His qualifications for such a task included his time as a leader writer on European affairs at the Guardian.



Gott was an accomplished historian as well as a journalist. He had a degree in History from Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and in 1963 he had co-authored, with Churchill's future biographer Martin Gilbert, *The Appeasers*, a well-received book on Neville Chamberlain's attempts to appease Hitler and thereby avoid going to war with Germany. In his later years he was an associate fellow of London University's Institute for the Study of the Americas.

While in Chile Gott's imagination was fired by the guerrilla wars that were sweeping across Latin America, inspired by the Cuban Revolution, of which Che Guevara had been a leading light. In 1970 he wrote a book on the subject, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, after which his publisher, Penguin, commissioned him to edit a series on the region, the Pelican Latin American Library. The most influential (at the time) of these now largely forgotten volumes was probably André Gunder Frank's *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, on which I remember organising a seminar at Cambridge's Centre of Latin American Studies in 1972. The series was eventually abandoned by Penguin after complaints of left-wing bias.



I first met Richard Gott in 1974, when he was back in England and dividing his time between the *Guardian* and *Latin American Newsletters*, a small specialist publishing company based in poky offices in New Bridge Street, London. He was not everybody's idea of a left-wing firebrand: his patrician manner, cultivated speech and air of self-confidence with which he expounded his sometimes outlandish ideas spoke of his public-school (Winchester) and Oxbridge education. But he had an engaging personality, and was able to get on even with people who disagreed profoundly with his world view. He knew everyone: on one occasion I returned to the

Newsletters' offices after lunch to find him chatting with Gabriel García Márquez like two old friends. He finally left the Newsletters in 1978 to take up a post as Features Editor of the Guardian.

Gott's radical opinions were sincerely held throughout his life, but he sometimes gave the impression that he regarded political ideas as amusing intellectual exercises rather than matters of life and death – what his friend John Gittings described as a “sometimes disconcerting eclecticism of attitude and belief”. At one point Gott suggested that the bloodthirsty Khmer Rouge tyrant Pol Pot had been carrying out an ‘interesting social experiment’ by trying to wipe out Cambodia’s entire intelligentsia, and raised the possibility that Western critics might have misjudged the man.

He further demonstrated his sometimes contrarian outlook when he initially defended the 1976 military coup in Argentina that overthrew the chaotic civilian government of María Estela (Isabelita) Martínez de Perón. He quickly changed his mind when General Jorge Videla and his fellow commanders began kidnapping and murdering anybody suspected of left-wing opinions.



In 1994 Richard Gott was denounced in the Spectator magazine for accepting hospitality and payments from the KGB, who had allegedly tried to turn him, not entirely successfully, into an ‘agent of influence’. He accepted that he had been guilty of “culpable stupidity”, but explained his actions by saying he thought the whole thing was just “an enjoyable joke” and MI6 knew all about it. Even the Daily Telegraph conceded that his Marxism was “freewheeling and anarchic”, rather than following any line laid down by

Moscow. This episode inevitably put an end to his career at the Guardian, but he was far from finished.



LAND WITHOUT EVIL

UTOPIAN JOURNEYS ACROSS THE
SOUTH AMERICAN
WATERSHED

RICHARD GOTT

In later life Gott was the author of several more books on Latin America, notably a new history of Cuba (2005), offering a left-wing perspective to counter the conservative views of the author of the standard English-language work on the subject, Hugh Thomas. But perhaps his most appealing book was the earlier *Land Without Evil* (1993), a part-history, part-travelogue on what he called the South American watershed (between the River Plate and Amazon basins), the vast, wild area between Bolivia, Paraguay and southern Brazil where the Jesuits had their missions until their expulsion in 1767.

Land Without Evil set out Gott's evolving views on what he saw as the original sin that afflicted Latin America: the destruction of indigenous societies and cultures by Spanish and Portuguese colonialists from their first arrival in the early sixteenth century. The Jesuits had attempted to protect the Guaraní people, as depicted idealistically in the 1986 movie *The Mission*, starring Jeremy Irons, but were ultimately defeated by the ruthless Spanish state.

Gott also wrote two laudatory books on Hugo Chávez, the army officer who was elected President of Venezuela in 1999 and dominated the country's public life until his death in 2013. Chávez embodied Gott's enduring hope that a providential saviour, often a military man, would liberate Latin American countries from the grip of imperialism – as he had briefly believed the Argentine military might do in 1976.



His negative opinion of Western imperialism was further elaborated in his 2012 history of the British Empire, which enraged more orthodox historians with its view that the empire had no redeeming features and brought nothing but suffering to the subject peoples.

Gott's personal life was also shaped by his passionate involvement with Latin America. He adopted two children with his first wife, the economist Ann Zammit: Inti from Bolivia and Araucana from Chile. At the time he was preparing his book on the guerrilla wars he remarked that Ann would have preferred him to join the struggle rather than just write about it.



¡Viva el Rey! Spain's parliamentary monarchy has served the country well
BAS editor William Chislett



A seminal person was missing last November from the official events to mark the 50th anniversary of the death of General Franco, the dictator who ruled Spain from 1939 to 1975 after winning a three-year civil war. That person was King Juan Carlos, Franco's successor as head of state, who, using the dictator's authoritarian powers, piloted a large part of the country's transition

to democracy and bravely faced down an attempted coup in 1981 by nostalgic Francoists. [1](#)

Juan Carlos, the grandson of King Alfonso XIII, who went into exile in 1931 when the Second Republic was proclaimed, abdicated in 2014 in favour of his son Felipe. The abdication followed various scandals, including an ill-judged and pricey elephant-hunting trip to Botswana with his former lover Corinna Larsen when Spain was in a double-dip recession and unemployment hit 24%. The King's ailing health was another factor, as was a corruption case for which his son-in-law was subsequently jailed for almost six years.

The Supreme Court investigated Juan Carlos in connection with suspected kickback payments for the contract won by Spanish companies to build the high-speed rail line between Medina and Mecca, but no evidence was found. Juan Carlos has lived in self-imposed exile in Abu Dhabi since 2020. He occasionally visits Spain.

The Socialist-led minority government, with the anti-monarchical hard-left Sumar as its junior partner, marked the Franco anniversary with events under the slogan 'Spain in Liberty', implying that the country was somehow free as soon as the dictator died. In fact, the transition to democracy, marred by political violence,[2](#) was hard won. Democracy was not achieved until the 1977 election and its underpinning in the 1978 constitution, which regulated the monarch's powers. The Constitution, approved in a referendum by 88.5% of total votes on a turnout of 67.1% and which has overseen the most stable and prosperous period in Spanish history, has overtaken the 1876-1923 constitution as Spain's longest lived.



The transition was engineered top down by Juan Carlos, gradualists in the regime (particularly Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez), agreement between the Communist-founded Democratic Junta and the Socialist-led Platform of Democratic Convergence united under the Platajunta on how to proceed, and bottom-up pressure from the streets.

Inevitably, the anniversary has sparked debate among the left about the form of government –monarchy or republic–, although with none of the intensity of the pro-republic discourse propagated by the hard-left Unidas Podemos ('United We Can') Pablo Iglesias when he was Deputy Prime Minister (2020-21). For the left, the 'original sin' of Spain's restored monarchy was that Franco appointed Juan Carlos as his successor (in 1969), which suggested, understandably at that time, that the 'new' monarchy was a continuation of the dictatorship rather than a break with it. Franco indeed told the Cortes (his rubber-stamp parliament) that Juan Carlos, as head of state, would contribute 'to a great extent, so that everything is tied up and well tied up for the future'.³ No sooner was Juan Carlos proclaimed King after Franco's death than he began to undo the knots.

Juan Carlos had no choice but to swear allegiance to the principles of the National Movement, the only legal political organisation, when he was proclaimed King two days after Franco's death. But, at the same time, he said he wanted to be 'the King of every citizen' and asserted that 'a free and modern society requires the participation of all in the decision-making process'.



As well as piloting the transition, Juan Carlos played an important role in projecting Spain's new image abroad as a democracy, promoting business and restoring international relations, a subject analysed in considerable depth in a book by Charles Powell, Elcano's Director, published in January (*El rey Juan Carlos I y la proyección exterior de España*, Galaxia Gutenberg). While Franco made just three official visits abroad –to meet Hitler, Mussolini and Petain– plus a single state visit to Portugal (at the invitation of fellow-dictator Oliveira Salazar), Juan Carlos made some 275 state, official and working visits during his reign, which took him to 103 countries.

Generally speaking, left-wing parties, traditionally more pro-republic than the right, are uncomfortable with the fact that it was Franco's appointee as head of state who propelled the transition to democracy. This ignores the fact that all of Franco's institutions were intact when the dictator died; his most ardent supporters, many of them from the time of the Civil War, held powerful positions. Reform from within, instead of a decisive break, which the left initially wanted, was the only path to democracy and reconciliation, and even that was bumpy.

Even Manuel Azaña, the President of the Second Republic during the Civil War who died in exile in France in 1940, believed the way to reinstate freedom in Spain was not by restoring the Republic, which he believed was dead and discredited, but through something new. 'The republic should not be held in higher esteem simply because its enemies [Francoism] are

worse',⁴ he said. By that 'something new' he meant consensus on how to attain democracy and reconciliation, including the restoration of the monarchy. Rodolfo Llopis (1895-1983), the leader of the Socialist Party in exile, let it be known before Franco died that if a monarch established a real democracy peacefully, his party would loyally support the monarchy.



Spain's history is characterised by institutional instability: nine constitutions since 1800, including Franco's Fundamental Laws, which were a kind of constitution, four civil wars, 13 military coups, two restorations of the Bourbon monarchy (1874 and 1975) and two Republics (the first one lasted less than two years).

The Second Republic (1931-39) is still idealised by some on the left. It was democratically elected after a political void, but it did not consolidate democracy nor govern in a fully democratic manner. Among its failures during the first months of the Civil War was not controlling public order sufficiently, particularly indiscriminate killings by anarchist groups, and among its errors an overly aggressive anti-clericalism which excluded swathes of society, though the reactionary Roman Catholic Church was a declared enemy of democracy and of much needed social reform.⁵

The monarchy is an apparently anachronistic and undemocratic institution in the 21st century, but in a country so sharply and bitterly divided into two main political blocs it serves Spain better than a republic by standing above the fray and acting as a unifying force and a symbol of stability. King Felipe VI is not identified with any political party, as an elected President of a Third Republic would be.⁶ An elected head of state is more prone to behaving partisanly.



In Spain's case, the monarchy assumes greater importance as an instrument for integrating the whole of a country from which the government of one region, Catalonia, sought to break away in 2017, and another, the Basque Country, has an independence movement supported by a significant minority.

In addition, the gross annual salary of King Felipe (€277,361) and his personal wealth (€2.57 million) are modest, even low, by European monarchy standards.

Felipe González, the Socialist Prime Minister between 1982 and 1996, says a 'plurinational republic with the right to self-determination', as defended by Pablo Iglesias, would be 'the seed of self-destruction' of Spain as a 'nation state'. 'I am radically opposed to that, and with whatever strength I have left, at my age and with the future ahead of me, I will fight it'.⁷

It is striking that many of the most prosperous and democratic countries in the world today are parliamentary monarchies. Of the 25 countries classified as ‘full democracies’ in the 2024 democracy index of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), including Spain, 11 are parliamentary monarchies (those marked in bold in Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index, 2024

Ranking of full democracies (1)	Overall score out of 10
1. Norway	9.81
2. New Zealand (2)	9.61
3. Sweden	9.39
4. Iceland	9.38
5. Switzerland	9.32
6. Finland	9.30
7. Denmark	9.28
8. Ireland	9.19
9. Netherlands	9.00
10. Luxembourg	8.88
11. Australia (2)	8.85
12. Taiwan	8.78
13. Germany	8.73

14. Canada (2)	8.69
15. Uruguay	8.67
16. Japan	8.48
17. UK	8.34
18. Costa Rica	8.29
19. Austria	8.28
20. Mauritius	8.23
21=. Estonia	8.13
21=. Spain	8.13
23=. Czech Republic	8.08
23=- Portugal	8.08
25. Greece	8.07

(1) Out of 167 countries and two territories. The ranking is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture and civil liberties.

(2) King Charles III is the monarch of 15 Commonwealth realms. They evolved out of the British Empire into fully independent states that retain the British monarch as head of state.

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Twelve of the top 30 countries in the UN’s Human Development Index (UNHDI) are parliamentary monarchies (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Human development index, 2025

Ranking of parliamentary monarchies in the top 30 countries (1)	Score out of 1
2. Norway	0.970
4. Denmark	0.962
6. Sweden	0.959
7. Australia (2)	0.958
8. Netherlands	0.955
10. Belgium	0.951
13. United Kingdom	0.946
16. Canada (2)	0.939
17. New Zealand (2)	0.938
23. Japan	0.925
25. Luxembourg	0.922
28. Spain	0.918

(1) A total of 195 countries and territories are ranked on the basis of life expectancy, years of schooling and gross national income per capita. The maximum score is one.

(2) King Charles III is the monarch of 15 Commonwealth realms. They evolved out of the British Empire into fully independent states that retain the British monarch as head of state.

Source: United Nations.

A change in the form of the state would not in itself resolve any of Spain's fundamental problems and could, history suggests, even aggravate them. Proclaiming a Third Republic would entail constitutional reform that would require a degree of political consensus that is impossible to achieve. The reform would require approval by a two-thirds majority of both the Congress and the Senate, followed by elections, ratification of the decision to change the form of government by the same two-thirds of the new Congress and Senate, and a referendum.

As the 2016 vote in the UK on whether to leave the EU has amply shown, referendums can be highly divisive, particularly if a decision of considerable importance is approved by a narrow margin as happened with Brexit. In the highly unlikely event that a referendum approved the return to a republic, Spain would probably be even more polarised than it is today.

A poll by Opina 360 published in October 2025 showed 52% of Spaniards favoured a parliamentary monarchy, with 43.5% supporting a republic. When broken down on party lines, 5% of Popular Party voters favour a republic and 61% of Socialist voters. By age groups, those born before 1958, by when Franco's disastrous autarkic economic policies were coming to an end, are the most supportive of the monarchy, while those born between 1995 and 2007 want a republic (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Parliamentary monarchy versus republic by generations, % support

	Parliamentary monarchy	Republic
Born before 1958	61.4	34.0
Born between 1958 and 1974	56.3	38.3
Born between 1975 and 1995	46.7	48.7
Born between 1995 and 2007	39.3	57.1

Source: Opina 360.

The institution of the monarchy is only considered the 41st out of Spain's 50 main problems, according to the state pollster CIS (see Figure 4). King Felipe inherited a toxic situation from his father and has cleaned up the monarchy's tarnished image. Polls show him to be more popular than Spain's political leaders and also some European ones. He has subjected the royal palace's accounts to external audits, in line with practices in the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, and made the results public. King Felipe has renounced any inheritance from his father and cut off his annual grant of €160,000. Other steps include a ban on immediate royal family members working in the public sector.

Figure 4. What, in your view, is the main problem in Spain? And the second? And the third? (%)

1. Housing	30.4
2. Immigration	20.7
8. Unemployment	14.2
9. Corruption and fraud	10.9
16. Education	5.5
21. Climate change	4.3
29. Functioning of democracy	1.7
31. Pensions	1.4
41. The monarchy	0.5

Source: CIS.

The parliamentary monarchy has proved its worth and is not a ‘problem’. Its supporters can proclaim with conviction: ¡viva el Rey!

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

1. Loyalty to the king was stronger than to the 1978 Constitution. General Guillermo Quintana Lacaci, a key player in defusing the 1981 coup on Juan Carlos’s orders, recognized in private that had the king ordered him to let it go ahead he would have done so. See Enrique Moradiellos (2025), ‘Juan Carlos y la transición a la democracia’, El País, 16/XI/2025. ↩
2. The Basque terrorist group ETA assassinated 808 people between 1975 and 2010. GRAPO (the First of October Revolutionary Anti-Fascist Resistance Groups) was held responsible for around 80 murders. Several extreme-right wing groups, which mainly responded to ETA’s attacks, committed around 60 murders. ↩

3. Tom Burns Marañón (2025), *El legado de Juan Carlos I. De héroe de la transición a rey en el exilio*, Almuzara, Córdoba, p. 53. ↩
4. Letter to Eduardo Blanco Amor dated 12 August 1940, quoted in Juan Francisco Fuentes (2025), *Hambre de patria. La idea de España en el exilio republicano*, Arzalia Ediciones, Madrid. Francisco Largo Caballero, the Socialist Prime Minister during most of the first year of the conflict and known as the ‘Spanish Lenin’, who died in exile in 1946, was asked in 1931 what was his main aspiration for Spain and responded ‘Republic! Republic! Republic!’. Asked the same question a few days before he died, he replied ‘Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!’. ↩
5. Thirteen bishops and 6,832 priests, nuns, monks and other religious personnel were murdered during the Civil War compared with around 900 clerics during the French Revolution. ↩
6. See *¿Sirve para algo la monarquía?* at <https://elpais.com/opinion/2025-12-08/sirve-para-algo-la-monarquia.html> by the distinguished sociologist Emilio Lamo de Espinosa, *El País*, 8/XII/2025. ↩
7. See https://www.lasexta.com/noticias/nacional/felipe-gonzalez-afirma-que-cambiar-monarquia-republicueta-que-defiende-iglesias-destruiria-espana_202009235f6bbbcad0cd870001f4c6ce.html. ↩



Ana María Matute y las heridas abiertas de posguerra

BAS editor Francisco Compán

La obra de Ana María Matute ocupa un lugar verdaderamente singular en la narrativa española del siglo XX, tanto por sus novelas, galardonadas con el Premio Nadal y el Premio Planeta entre otros, como por sus cuentos cortos. Aunque su obra no se alinea de forma particularmente explícita con ninguna ideología política, late en ella un claro impulso de compromiso social, visible en la manera en que retrata las desigualdades, la exclusión y las heridas todavía abiertas de la posguerra. Desde la estética realista que predominaba en su generación, Matute supo abrirse camino hacia un estilo inconfundible, con una prosa, cargada de emoción y matices sensoriales, y creando espacios narrativos en los que conviven la denuncia y la poesía.

Uno de los rasgos más característicos de su escritura es la presencia de la infancia y la adolescencia como ámbitos simbólicos privilegiados. En esos personajes jóvenes —a menudo frágiles, marcados por la pérdida o la injusticia— la autora encuentra un vehículo para mostrar tanto las consecuencias más sombrías de la guerra y la dictadura como la sorprendente capacidad de imaginación y resistencia que aún pervive en ellos. Su mirada, lejos de caer en la ternura fácil, combina una aguda conciencia crítica con un profundo humanismo.

En reconocimiento a su trayectoria, Matute fue elegida miembro de la Real Academia Española en 1996. Más tarde obtuvo el Premio Nacional de las Letras Españolas (2007), convirtiéndose en la tercera mujer en recibirlo, y coronó su carrera con el Premio Cervantes en 2010.

Dentro del extenso rango de cuentos cortos de la escritora catalana, desde el Bulletin, les presentamos un análisis de [La conciencia](#) y de [Pecado de omisión](#) para rendir homenaje a su dilatada carrera.



Ana María Matute: La conciencia y el poder del conocimiento

Laura Lis

La conciencia es un cuento de Ana María Matute, una de las autoras más importantes del siglo XX, conocida por destacar la desigualdad social y la moralidad débil de las élites.

La historia sigue a Mariana, una mujer de cierta posición social cuya autoridad se ve gradualmente debilitada por un vagabundo, nada más que con sus palabras. A través de la hospitalidad involuntaria de Mariana, su creciente angustia psicológica y la manipulación del viejo vagabundo, Matute revela que el verdadero poder no reside en la riqueza material, sino en la habilidad de controlar la percepción y explotar la inseguridad humana.

A pesar de la clase social de Mariana, ella no tiene control absoluto sobre sus decisiones. Si realmente pudiera hacer lo que quisiera, no le habría dado techo al viejo en primer lugar. Esto es evidente, ya que una de las primeras cosas que le dice cuando él le pide ayuda es «Vete, y que Dios te ampare», lo que demuestra que no estaba dispuesta a invitarlo a entrar. Solo cuando las dos criadas, Marcelina y Salomé, llegan corriendo, Mariana permite que el hombre se quede a pasar la noche. De hecho, incluso «sintió un raro alivio» ver a las criadas, lo que nos permite deducir que se sentía incómoda estando sola con el hombre.

Además, es posible que la presencia de otras dos personas obligara de alguna manera a Mariana a ayudar al hombre a causa de la presión social: si las dos criadas podían tener un lugar donde huir de la lluvia, sería maleducado no permitir que el hombre tuviera lo mismo. Es probable que la autora haya hecho esto para reflejar cómo un estatus social digno no concede la libertad y el control absoluto a las personas. De hecho, a veces

las cosas invisibles, como la presión social y las expectativas, pueden ejercer un mayor control sobre las personas más afortunadas, haciéndoles hacer cosas con las que no están de acuerdo, y así no tienen control absoluto sobre algunas decisiones, como en el caso de Mariana.



A medida que se va desplegando la historia. empezamos a notar un desequilibrio de poder entre el vagabundo y Mariana. Sin embargo, lo que subvierte las expectativas de los lectores es que el anciano, que la noche anterior pedía refugio, es en realidad quien tiene poder sobre Mariana, a pesar de que ella parece ser más rica y acomodada que él. Esto se hace aparente cuando el hombre dice «los vagabundos se enteran de las cosas» y afirma que sabe algo que Mariana hizo, lo que provoca que Mariana entre en pánico y pregunte «¿Qué dice? ¿Qué es lo que sabe... ¿Qué es lo que vio?».

Ella comienza a temer al hombre y el uso de tres preguntas consecutivas demuestra lo desesperada que está por obtener respuestas.

Mientras todo esto sucede, el vagabundo sonríe y parece muy relajado y satisfecho consigo mismo: ha descubierto una forma de manipular a Mariana y hacer que le permita quedarse allí más tiempo del que ella tenía inicialmente planeado. Esta escena ilustra de manera eficaz que, en realidad, la clase social no es igual al poder y que, muy a menudo, tener conocimientos, especialmente sobre los secretos de otra persona, es más valioso que tener riqueza material.

A lo largo de la historia, el vagabundo es un personaje que demuestra que el poder en la sociedad no depende sólo del dinero; por el contrario, su falta de riqueza le ha dado la experiencia suficiente para saber cómo conseguir lo que quiere. Aunque su afirmación de 'saber algo' sobre Mariana es ambigua, tiene un efecto perjudicial para ella. Se siente impotente debido a su conciencia culpable, y el viejo se aprovecha de esto. En un momento, Mariana afirma que «La vida no es vida con esta amenaza», lo que demuestra que ni su dinero ni su estatus pueden protegerla ni salvarla del daño que le está causando su conciencia.

Incluso cuando Mariana finalmente pide al vagabundo que se marche, y él revela que todo era un engaño, ya que sabe que todos, incluida Mariana, ocultan algo de lo que se avergüenzan, conserva su poder sobre la clase alta: sabe cómo manipular a las personas, ya que conoce cómo suelen funcionar sus mentes, así que tiene conocimientos de exactamente qué palabras les afectan más, como su última advertencia a Mariana de «vigila a tu Antonio». Se podría postular que 'el vagabundo' en esta historia simboliza la conciencia y el potencial subversivo de los sin poder, lo que acaba revelando que el verdadero poder no se basa en la clase social ni en la riqueza, sino en la capacidad de manipular la culpa y el miedo.

Para concluir, en *La conciencia*, Ana María Matute utiliza el personaje de Mariana para desafiar la creencia de que quienes tienen más dinero tienen más poder y más control sobre las personas más pobres. El estado de pánico de Mariana debido a su conciencia culpable se contrasta con la tranquilidad del anciano, lo que crea un inusual desequilibrio de poder a lo largo de la historia. Ana María Matute subvierte de manera brillante nuestras expectativas sociales y empodera a las personas menos afortunadas al mostrar que tener mucho dinero no siempre te hace fuerte, pero el conocimiento sí.

Laura Lis is studying Spanish, Psychology and Chemistry for A level at Kettering Buccleuch Academy and hopes to read Modern Languages, specifically Spanish, at university.



Ana María Matute's *Pecado de omisión*: violence and indifference in Franco's Spain

Sienna O'Keefe

Ana María Matute's *Pecado de omisión*, though brief, makes an impact far greater than many longer works.

On first reading, I was unsettled by how much anguish could be compressed into so few words. Whilst the plot is simple – a shepherd boy is denied an education and dignity – there is an underlying commentary on class inequality and the unspoken violence of Franco-era Spain. It is a story that invites you to reflect long after you have finished reading it.

Pecado de omisión, published in 1961, tells how the orphan Lope is sent by his wealthy relative Emeterio to herd sheep in the remote pasture of Sagrado. “Te vas de pastor a Sagrado” – one terse sentence sees the wealthy relative banish the orphan boy to years of isolation in the mountains. “Te vas” underscores his absolute authority.

Lope is treated as a servant rather than family. There is no discussion, no attempt to educate him – he is quietly dismissed. Matute reinforces this exclusion through the barren landscape: “un azul profundo, terrible, ciego”. Nature here is not romantic, and cold nights and silence replace human contact. The setting serves as a metaphor for the barren emotional landscape shaped by poverty and social neglect. Aileen Dever notes that “Lope can accomplish nothing meaningful, like so many living under Franco.” [1](#)

Lope's sleeping quarters are subhuman. The mud hut symbolises how his status has been reduced to that of an animal. He even enters it on all fours: "En el chozo sólo cabían echados y tenía que entrar a gatas, medio arrastrándose. Pero se estaba fresco en el verano y bastante abrigado en el invierno".

Janet Díaz observes that "under Franco's regime, Spanish authors, in order to publish, were forced to exercise self-censorship, or to disguise their messages behind symbols, allegories, and other tricks to mislead the censors".² By her use of symbolism, Matute manages to evade the censors. It seems likely that Emeterio symbolises Franco, whilst Lope (from *lupus*, "wolf") is cast as a lone, near-feral survivor.

Lope is a character who should embody the fresh possibilities of a reborn Spain, yet shut away in his hovel "con la techumbre de barro encima de los ojos", he grows older without advancing. He is a striking image of the wasted potential, discrimination and enforced stagnation endured by countless victims of Franco's dictatorship.

By contrast, Emeterio is a man of status and power, with no financial need to send Lope away: "Emeterio era el alcalde y tenía una casa de dos pisos asomada a la plaza del pueblo, redonda y rojiza bajo el sol de agosto".



Years of isolation follow, until, as a young man, Lope descends to the village and sees Manuel, his former schoolmate. He was academically superior to Manuel at school, but Manuel is now the refined version of what Lope might have become. He offers Lope a cigarette from a case of polished silver. Lope notes the contrast in their fingers – a fine, delicate hand, as opposed to his own heavy, clumsy hand: “Qué rara mano la de aquel otro: una mano fina, con dedos como gusanos grandes, ágiles, blancos, flexibles. Qué mano aquella, de color de cera, con las uñas brillantes, pulidas. Qué mano extraña: ni las mujeres la tenían igual”.

The short story builds to the point where Lope suddenly picks up a stone and kills Emeterio: “Lentamente, Lope la cogió entre sus manos”. Matute’s simple verb – cogió– strips the moment of ornament. The rock is red, symbolising his anger. Matute offers no dramatic build up and no psychological explanation: the silence of the narrative echoes the years of silence endured by Lope and his cries for everything he has missed out on – care, education, justice, and the life a young man deserved. The pious village women howl at him in fury: their indignant assertions that Lope owed a debt of gratitude to Emeterio is hypocritical, in keeping with the society in which they were living, where the reality perceived by many was far from what truly transpired.

The title *Pecado de omisión* suggests a failure to do what is morally required. Lope commits a sin by killing, yet Emeterio commits the first sin by denying Lope the life he deserved. Whom should the reader consider to be the one who bears responsibility? The boy who strikes, or the man who drove him to it? The reader is left feeling haunted and bereft.

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Sienna O'Keefe attends Westminster School where she is studying Spanish, Latin, History of Art and Maths for A-Levels. She hopes to read Spanish at university.

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Empire, Inquisition and Cultos: tabletop gaming in the Spanish-speaking world

BAS Production Editor Simon Butler



The year is 1620: the Spanish Empire is at its zenith, but France, Holland, England and Sweden are conspiring to undermine its power. In response, the 'Order of the Hidden' arises, sworn to defend the Empire from all external threats.

And that's where you can come in, because the Máscaras del Imperio (Masks of the Empire) Tabletop Role-Playing Game (TTRPG) places participants in the thick of the action as Members of the Order.



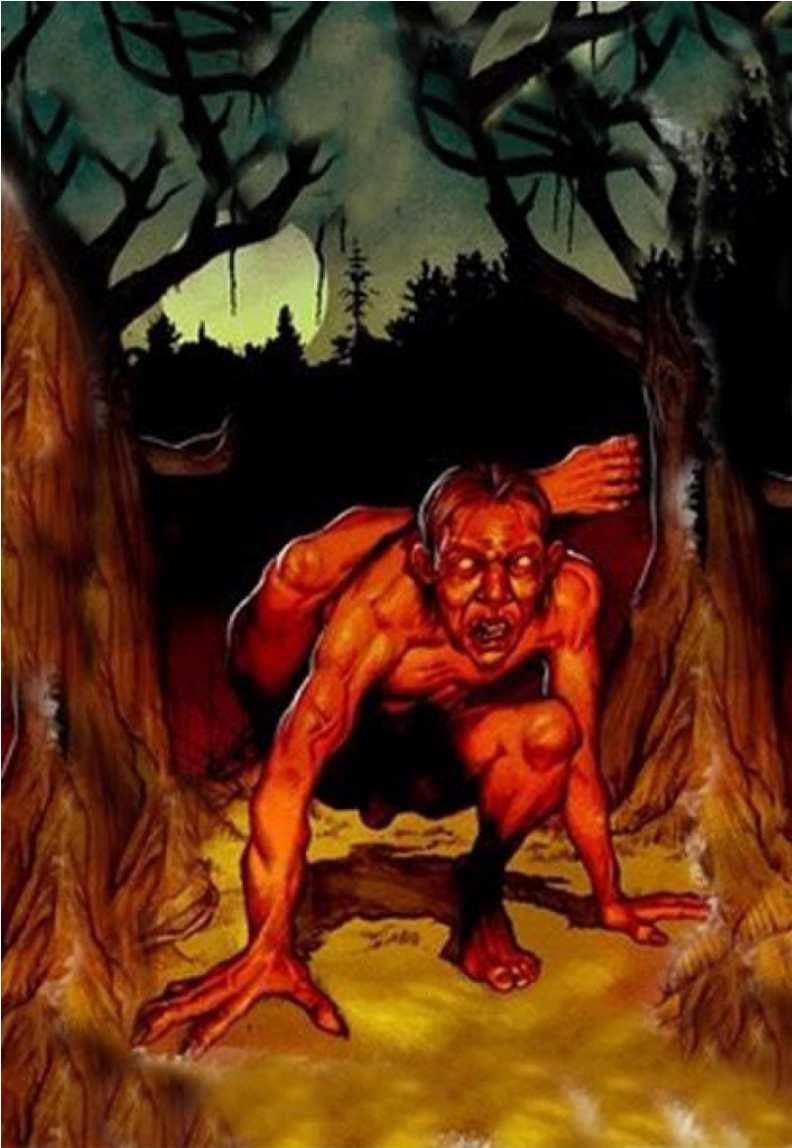
Or you might prefer to explore an earlier time in a game called Aquelarre, set against a backdrop of warring Iberian kingdoms and a rigid feudal system plagued by hunger and disease. Players choose a class for their characters and walk a fine line between living out their ordinary lives and using forbidden magic to improve their lot, gain experience and confront the Fraternitas Vera Lucis (Inquisition).

If TTRPGs are unfamiliar terrain for you, they use what is known to the cognoscenti as a tabletop-based improvisational format. They are usually organised by a Game Master (GM), who prepares the material and any required props. Typically, three or more players sit down with the GM and generate a character on a paper character sheet, including his or her statistics, occupation, skills, and background. Players then interactively play the game through their characters in an adventure that can take one or more two to four-hour sessions to complete.

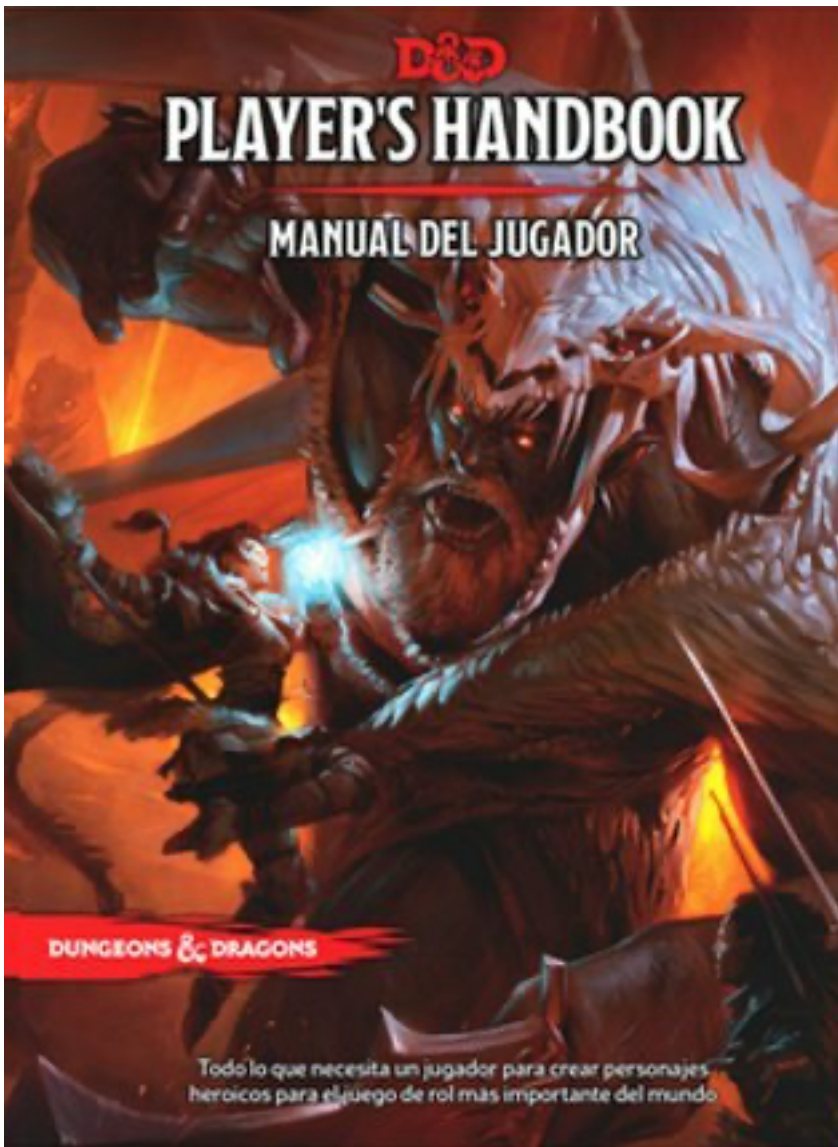
With TTRPGs becoming increasingly popular worldwide, it's worth taking stock of the educational, historical and cultural benefits for Spanish speakers. These games give people the chance to experience Spanish history and culture in a vivid manner, meet others with similar interests, and improve their Spanish.

After Franco's dictatorship ended, cultural and social opportunities expanded in Spain, allowing the establishment of dedicated TTRPG communities. The interest in TTRPGs then spread throughout the Spanish-speaking world, with independent game publishers designing innovative products.

Spain provides a diverse historical backdrop for TTRPGs, with Romans, Carthaginians, Visigoths, and Moors all making significant contributions to its regional identities and culture. This history has inspired the creation of many TTRPGs.



TTRPG publishers in the Americas have found inspiration both in the Conquest and in pre-Colombian mythology. For example, the Lovecraftian *Cultos Innombrables* explore legends, supernatural creatures and mythology from Latin America. One such draws on the folklore of Chiloé in southern Chile, where the mysterious Invunche stands as a guardian watching over the Cave of Quicavi, which serves as a witches' coven. The coven is said to use an illuminated ghost ship to enslave local sailors. The witches have also cast a spell over the forest, so that its inhabitants can transform into birds that carry the coven's messages.



Many English TTRPGs, such as the game played most widely around the world, Dungeons & Dragons, have several of their core game books and adventures translated into Spanish. These include La Maldición de Strahd (Curse of Strahd) – gothic horror in the demiplane of Ravenloft; Viajes por la Ciudadela Radiante (Journeys Through the Radiant Citadel) – an anthology of thirteen adventures inspired by cultures across the world; and Dragonlance: La Sombra de la Reina de los Dragones (Shadow of the Dragon Queen) – set in the fantasy world of Krynn.

This is just a small sample of the TTRPGs that are now available in Spanish. For more information, and to find more games and interested players, I can recommend the PiedraBruja community website (Spanish) at <https://piedrabruja.cl/>

Links:

Cultos Innombrables: <https://www.nosolorol.com/es/cultos-innombrables/85/cultos-innombrables-papel>

Aquelarre: <https://www.drivethrurpg.com/en/product/237059/>

Máscaras del Imperio (Spanish): <https://www.drivethrurpg.com/en/product/265006/mascaras-del-imperio/>



Behind the scenes at the Bulletin of Advanced Spanish

In case any of our readers are intrigued by the process that goes into generating three editions of this Bulletin each year, we decided that in this edition we would open the lid to allow sight of some of the workings. If this exercise proves worthwhile (we get statistics on the number of hits on each page...), we can make it a regular feature. And by way of enticement for this first such communication, we have a special message for you further down... read on.

After each edition of the Bulletin is launched, there is a period of 10-12 weeks of calm when we busy boletineros get on with our other projects – although the Senior Editor’s antennae remain attuned 24-hours a day to any stories emerging from the Spanish-speaking world that may potentially be of interest to our readership. Then about a month before the deadline for submissions, the editors meet online to discuss ideas for the contents list of the next edition, looking to ensure the right mix of culture, history, current affairs, etc, and a good geographical spread.

Even before the US raid on Maduro, Venezuela was going to feature in our Spring 2026 edition, given the interest generated in the UK by the Michael Palin TV documentary and accompanying In Venezuela travel journal on display in UK bookshops.

As a thrice yearly publication we don’t do news reporting, but the US intervention on 3 January 2026 opened up three distinct lines of analysis, all of which deserved coverage. Added freshness of perspective was achieved by (Professor of Film and Literature) Stephen Hart taking on the geopolitical dimension, and (ex-diplomat) Robin Wallis identifying an unexpected García Márquez angle to the Palin project. Our Latin America editor Clara Riveros’ conversation with Venezuelan expert Andrés Cañizález gives just the kind of on-the-ground expert insight that we were hoping to include.

One enriching aspect of the Bulletin is its sense of history, which adds a temporal dimension to our appreciation of the Spanish-speaking world. In this edition William Chislett reminds us that the freedom celebrated in 2025 (Spain's 50th year since Franco) was not actually secured at the time of the dictator's death. William is well placed to provide such insights, because he was there.

The aftermath of our 2025 Essay Competition continues to inspire student submissions for publication. We are delighted to encourage a new generation of hispanists to express themselves in print, and duly decided to spread the eight best offerings across this Spring edition and also the Summer edition, due out in May. With the competitive aspect out of the way, our editors have been able to work with student authors to help them produce top-quality drafts for publication.

Just before launching this edition, we decided to bring forward an article by our Production Editor Simon Butler, originally slated for the Summer but now broadening out the range of topics covered in the Spring. New to Role Playing Games? Check out Simon's article to discover the insights these can offer into the history and culture of the Spanish-speaking world.

Our Summer edition will include reflections on the feuds that fatally weakened the Republican camp in the Spanish Civil War, cholera in Peru, Basque identity, and the Costa Rican path to happiness. We would love an article about Rosalía, but haven't yet found an author.

Now for the 'special message' mentioned above, from our founding editors. It's a chance for you to help us – for which we would be grateful! They say:

“Working on the Bulletin is a great way to expand one's knowledge and meet new people in the hispanophile community, while also promoting interest in this most fulfilling of academic subjects. The Bulletin is now in its ninth year, and the time has come to plan for our Senior Editor to hand over to a successor, in the next year or so. Perhaps you, valued reader, might know someone who would enjoy taking on that role? Perhaps you yourself would find it inspiring to do so? The position might suit a teacher, lecturer, journalist, tour guide or diplomat scaling back on their workload, a graduate looking to expand into publishing, or a technological wizard able to harness virtual resources to facilitate the editorial process.”

To share your ideas on this, or any other matter, you're welcome to get in touch via the Contact Us button or our email address – bulletinofadvancedspanish@gmail.com . We'd be delighted to hear from you.

Finally: in November 2025 six of our editorial team were pictured (see top of page) at the Spanish Ambassador's Residence: from left to right, Helen Laurenson, Alfredo Benito, Francisco Compán, William Chislett, Robin Wallis and Serena Thandi. The occasion was a 'conversation' between William and Michael Portillo to mark the launch of William's book *Los curiosos impertinentes: hispanófilos británicos de los siglos XIX-XXI* (see our Spring and Summer 2025 editions for further details). Our Editorial Team page has more information about (and photos of) other team members.

¡Felices Pascuas!