Queridos niños
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David Trueba's *Queridos niños* covers the three-week presidential campaign of Amelia Tomás, a history professor who has ascended to the role of government minister. After the previous face of her party was ensnared in a scandal, Amelia is selected to run for president of Spain.

The novel is narrated by Basilio, a cynical speechwriter who has been brought on by the campaign to polish up Amelia's speeches. He dictates the novel as if he is speaking directly to Amelia, weaving together events from the campaign with episodes from his earlier life that explain why he's so well-suited for the role. The book's title, *Queridos niños* [Dear children] is how Basilio refers, with a mixture of affection and condescension, to the voting populace.

As the campaign goes on, Basilio's admiration for Amelia grows, and he slips into the role of a fixer, using connections from his time as a journalist to suppress negative stories. He also demonstrates an imprudent streak that puts him at odds with party leadership.

The entirety of the novel is spent on the road: aboard the campaign bus, in subpar restaurants and impersonal hotels, and at hurried campaign stops. As the bus crisscrosses Spain, Basilio provides a never-ending stream of acidic commentary on the local landscape, political actors, and the regional cuisine.

In the first chapter of the book, Basilio states plainly that his rivals have long described him as a "hippopotamus," due to his weight, but he seems to be unbothered. Instead, he styles himself as a gourmand and a bon vivant, and the book ends up as a love letter to Spanish food and wine, with vivid descriptions of local specialties throughout. His relationship to his body and how his weight affects how others perceive him are frequently occurring motifs throughout the novel.

Aboard the bus with Basilio are a small handful of characters, including an ambitious, well-connected campaign manager fresh out of school; an analytics-obsessed social media guru; an influencer hired to update the candidate's image; and Amelia herself, who remains something of a cipher throughout the novel but nonetheless proves a quick study in the world of electoral politics.

Through the character of Basilio, Trueba shows off his keen observational skills, skewering party bosses and rival candidates alike. The minor characters are also well-written, from a pair of pop stars to a wardrobe stylist stuck in the past.

The book also serves as a meditation on what it means to be a conservative politician, particularly within a Spanish context. Amelia must appeal to multiple groups, from rural farmers to moneyed urban residents, without losing voters to her far-right rival. Trueba describes with glee the

inconsistencies and contortions that result as the party strives to cover all its bases.

While the prose is straightforward, some of Basilio's culinary commentary will require work to convey to a reader unfamiliar with the regional cuisines of Spain. Another challenge are the nicknames that Basilio has for rival candidates, newspapers, and even political parties.

There is overlap between Trueba's biography and his narrator's backstory. Both worked for a time as journalists, and both spent several years living in the United States. His novel *Saber perder* [*Learning to Lose*] was translated into English by Mara Faye Lethem and published in the U.S. by Penguin Random House.

As a behind-the-scenes look at political campaigns, the book has widespread appeal—American readers will recognize many of the tactics from recent elections in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. In particular, the clash between traditional media—as personified by Basilio—and the party's digital strategists will resonate.