

## Argentina's Demographics & Immigration

Now estimated at 46 million people, Argentina's population is the result of waves of European immigration, notably Italians and Spanish, between the mid nineteenth and twentieth centuries, mixed with indigenous, African and Creole populations and, in more recent decades, other South American nationalities such as Bolivians, Paraguayans and Chileans, and Asians such as Chinese and Korean. The country is also home to the largest **Irish diaspora** of South America, with the bulk of immigrants arriving during the British-induced Irish famine of 1850-1870. Half a million people of Irish descent live in Argentina today.

Although viewed as "the most European nation of Latin America," Argentina is a country where heterogeneity has been suppressed. Not unlike in other neighboring nations, authoritarian practices and racist ideology have attempted to eliminate differences in order to fulfill the ideals of modernization and global capitalism.

### The Malvinas / Falklands War

The 1982 war between Argentina and Great Britain for sovereignty over a group of islands located 480 miles northeast of Cape Horn was the only war in which Argentina participated during the twentieth century, and the only one that involved civilians. Most Argentines supported the military confrontation, just as the dictatorial and genocidal regime that started it underwent its deepest crisis of legitimacy. No previous event in Argentine history had lent itself to such consensus between the military and civil society based on a sense of national belonging.



*Thousands gather in Buenos Aires' Plaza de Mayo to support the landing on the Malvinas on April 2, 1982.*

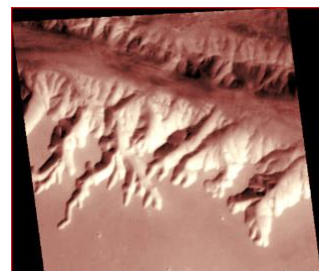
Eventually, Argentina's defeat brought with it a victory insofar as it spelled the end of the dictatorship and paved the way for a return to democracy.

Not only did the war leave about 900 Argentines dead (649 career and conscripted soldiers died in the conflict and 300-500 survivors committed suicide), it also left many unresolved questions soon to be addressed by a rich corpus of novels, short stories and poems.

~ Adapted from "Malvinas / Falklands War Literature," by Julieta Vitullo. *World Literature in Spanish: An Encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2011.

## Lichtenberg Figures

Named after the German physicist who first identified them, Lichtenberg figures are branching tree-like patterns created by high voltage electrical discharge. They can occur in nature as a result of a **lightning bolt**, creating fern-like, fractal patterns on the affected surfaces. This can happen on the ground or on a person's body. The play makes poetic use of this phenomenon by drawing a connection between this phenomenon and the marks on James's arms.



## Valles Marineris, Heroes' Scars, Ares's Loves & Allegiances

This giant canyon in Mars five times longer than the Grand Canyon takes the form of a Lichtenberg-like formation. This has led the proponents of the Electric Universe theory to argue that Mars was hit by tremendous electric forces (such as a giant plasma thunderbolt).

Electric Universe cosmologists argue that “the Scarface motif” found in many ancient heroes, warriors and gods struck down by a “lightning weapon,” is a mythical representation of a cosmic phenomenon that ancient peoples may have witnessed during a phase of high interplanetary electrical discharge activity. Though mainstream physics dismisses these arguments, the association between cosmology and mythology provides an intriguing poetic framework for the fantastical elements in the play.

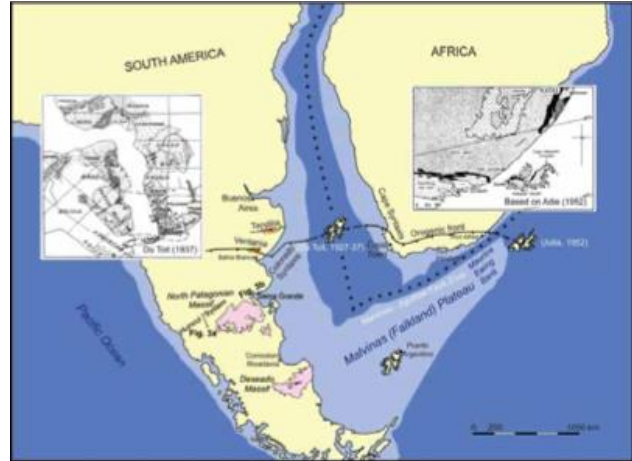
Ἄρης, **Mars** for the Romans, was the Olympian god of war, son of Hera and Zeus. While his worshipping by the Greeks was relatively unimportant, he was central in Roman religion, only second to Zeus. He never married, but had many liaisons, most famously with Aphrodite (**Venus**).

At the outset of the Trojan War, the gods separated into pro-Greek and pro-Trojan factions. Ares was indifferent and, at first, promised his mother Hera and sister Athena that he would side with the Greeks. However, Aphrodite convinced him to **break his alliance** and join her in support of the Trojans.

## ***Two Big Black Bags: Historical Timeline*** ~ color denotes a fictional event

### **180 million years ago**

Gondwana breaks up, creating South America, Africa and other landmasses such as two small islands off the coast of Patagonia: Gran Malvina and Soledad (West and East Falkland). Fossils link the islands to South America, but their geological origin remains controversial, with the British maintaining they were part of a separate microplate adjacent to Eastern Cape, South Africa.



Contrasting alternatives for the origin of the Malvinas/Falkland Plateau.

### **16,000 years ago**



The fox-like *Dusicyon avus* from Patagonia and the *Dusicyon australis* (aka warrarh wolf) separate as two distinct species. Around that time, sea levels drop and the warrarh wolf travels by land to today's Falklands. As the only large mammal of the islands, the origins of the warrarh were a mystery for centuries, until studies published in 2013.

### **1536, 1580**

First and second foundation of Buenos Aires by Spanish conquerors. Colonization and genocide of native peoples begin.

### **16<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> centuries**

Amerigo Vespucci, Fernão de Magalhães, John Davis, Richard Hawkins and Sebald de Weert sail close to Patagonia, causing three European nations to later lay claim to the discovery of the islands: Spain, Great Britain and Holland.

## 1690

Captain John Strong makes the first recorded landing on the islands and names the sound between the two “Falklands Sound” after his sponsor Anthony Cary, 5th Viscount of Falkland from Scotland.

## 1760-70s

First known human settlements coexist on the islands, unaware of each other: Frenchmen from the Saint-Malo region under Louis-Antoine de Bougainville on the East; Commodore John Byron and his Englishmen on the West. The English plant the Union Jack and leave. In 1767, the Spaniards take over the French settlement. In 1774, the British leave their settlement in West Falkland for economic reasons.



1952 stamp picturing a 1764 map based on a survey from Bougainville’s journey.

## 1806-07

In the context of the Napoleonic Wars (with Spain an ally of Napoleonic France), Great Britain attempts to seize control of the Spanish colony of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata (present-day Argentina and Uruguay). Local militias reject the invasions, furthering the will of the *Criollos*\* to become independent from Spain.

\* Locals of Spanish descent born in the colonies.

## 1810, 1816

A revolution ensues in Buenos Aires on May 25, 1810. The Spanish abandon their settlement on the Malvinas in 1811. On July 9, 1816, Argentina declares its independence from Spain.

## 1820

A ship from the newly independent “United Provinces of the River Plate” (later Argentina) arrives at the islands to reclaim sovereignty as part of Spain’s colonial legacy.

## 1830-40s

In 1833, British forces expel the Argentine officials and begin a military occupation. A small guerrilla of gauchos fails to defeat the British invaders. Argentina’s efforts to regain sovereignty are unsuccessful. Scottish settlers establish a pastoral community.



## 1830-40s (Cont.)

The HMS Beagle visits the Falklands in 1833 and 1834. Aboard is 24-years-old **Charles Darwin**. Though he's mostly unimpressed by the islands, his notes about the warrah wolf suggest he was starting to think about the development of animals in isolation.

## 1880-90

A British community of 1,800 people live on the islands under colonial status.

## 1890-1982

Argentina's diplomatic efforts to regain control of the islands continue. The claim for sovereignty takes root in the educational system and in the collective consciousness as Argentina's most important national cause.

## 1907

**James' Grandma, Rose, is born in West Ireland.**

## 1920

**Rose's Irish family emigrates to Argentina and settles in a province northeast of Buenos Aires. Rose will marry an Irish immigrant named Walsh.**

## 1960s

Argentina's efforts result in conversations about joint ownership of the islands and a potential renunciation by Great Britain.

## 1963

**Santiago Enrique Walsh (aka James) is born in a small-town northeast of BA.**



1976 stamp from Argentina.

## 1976

A military Junta overthrows Argentina's democratic government, initiating the bloodiest dictatorship in the country's history. 30,000 people are "disappeared" and many more tortured, imprisoned or sent to exile.



"Never Again." Human rights organizations' demand for justice, over a white scarf representing the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo's struggle to find their disappeared children.

**1981**

**Santiago (aka James) enters the mandatory military service at age 18.**

(Service is compulsory between 1904 and 1994. A lottery system is used to match the last three numbers of young men's national IDs with a number determining what military branch they'll join, or if they'll be exempt.)

**1982**



Lieutenant General Leopoldo Galtieri, a notorious alcoholic, plans an invasion to the Falklands so as to promote patriotism and prop up the crumbling military regime. Argentine forces launch a full-scale occupation of the islands' capital, Port Stanley, on April 2.

**Santiago turns 19 this day.**

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher assembles a naval task force of 30 warships. With Britain 8,000 miles away, it takes weeks for the ships to arrive.

On May 2, the HMS Conqueror attacks the Argentine navy cruiser General Belgrano outside of the agreed maritime exclusion zone, killing 323 Argentine sailors, most of them conscripted.

Land, air, and naval battles end in Argentina's surrender on June 14. The defeat hastens the downfall of the dictatorship, paving the way for a return to democracy in 1983.

649 Argentines, 255 British, and three Islanders die during the hostilities. **10,000 Argentines** return home. Approximately 500 ex-combatants commit suicide after the war, which may be close to the number of suicides on the British side.



Argentine conscripted soldiers during the war.

**2007**

As the 25th anniversary of the war approaches, more Argentine ex-combatants begin to speak against the brutal abuses committed by their superiors during the war. **This marks the present of Two Big Black Bags.**

## Boring School Teacher's White Smock

Teachers and students in Argentine public schools wear a white smock similar to a lab coat. The use of this smock was introduced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> as an equalizer that promoted cleanliness, decency and decorum. Traditionally, mothers took pride in sending their children to school in impeccable white smocks.



## Sargento's Moustache



During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, political antagonism in Argentina impacted men's use of hair styles, specifically the moustache. After the formation of the liberal state in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social status – rather than political affinity – became the primary cause of choice in hair

styles. Moustaches came to represent masculinity – as defined by men's status as "warriors" – and struggles revolved around the prerogative to wear them. In the context of *Two Big Black Bags*, Sargento wears a moustache, as did most lower rank officers of the 1970-80s. During this period, the lower the social recognition of a rank or institution within the armed forces, the higher was the need for this sign of distinction. A note in the play reads, "Sargento wears a moustache, or else he wouldn't be a sergeant of the last military dictatorship in Argentina."

Source: Roy Hora, "Identidad política, clase y masculinidad: el bigote en Argentina. De Rosas a Yrigoyen," *Anuario IEHS* 36(1) 2021, 85-114.