ARBiT
it happens here...

Tuning In: Celebrating World Radio Day

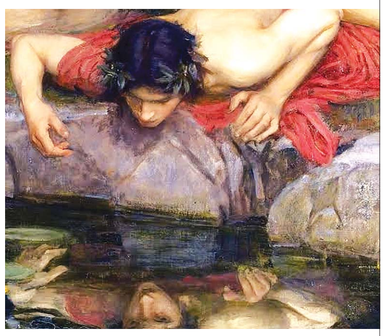
World Radio Day, observed every year on February 13, celebrates the enduring power of radio as a medium that informs, entertains, and connects people across the globe. From local news and music to educational programs and storytelling, radio continues to reach communities in ways no other platform can. It fosters dialogue, spreads awareness, and brings voices from every corner of society to the forefront. On this day, listeners and broadcasters alike acknowledge how radio transcends borders, languages, and cultures, reminding us that sometimes, all it takes is a simple broadcast to inform, inspire, and unite millions of people worldwide.

राष्ट्रदूत
FRIDAY
13 February 2026
A-B

#CURSE

The Perfect Love

Narcissus and the Tragedy of Falling in Love with One's Own Reflection



The myth of Narcissus tells the story of a love that is doomed from the very moment it is born, a love directed not towards another person, but towards the self. Cursed by the gods, Narcissus becomes the embodiment of desire without fulfillment when he falls in love with his own reflection.

Narcissus was a youth of extraordinary beauty, admired by many and desired by all who saw him. Yet, he rejected every admirer with cold indifference, incapable of responding to affection or empathy. His cruelty towards those who loved him, especially the nymph Echo, drew the attention of the gods. To punish him, divine justice did not inflict physical suffering but emotional torment. Narcissus was condemned to experience unreturned love himself.

The curse took effect when Narcissus came upon a still, clear pool of water. As he leaned forward to drink, he saw a beautiful face gazing back at him. Unaware that the image was his own reflection, he became instantly enamored. The eyes that met his own, the lips that seemed to smile in response, appeared alive and full of promise. Yet, no matter how deeply he desired this figure, it remained untouchable.

What makes this moment tragic is Narcissus' ignorance. He does not recognize himself; instead, he believes he has found another being worthy of his love. Every attempt to reach the beloved image disturbs the water, causing the reflection to vanish, only to return once the surface becomes still again. This endless cycle traps Narcissus in longing. He is close to what he loves, yet, forever separated from it.

The beauty of the myth lies in its symbolism. Narcissus' love is pure but fatally misplaced. It lacks reciprocity, growth, and connection. Loving one's own reflection becomes a metaphor for emotional isolation, a self so absorbed that it cannot truly encounter another. The punishment fits the crime: having denied love to others, Narcissus is denied fulfillment in love himself.

Unable to tear himself away from the pool, Narcissus slowly wastes away, consumed by desire and despair. After his death, a flower blooms where he once lay, forever bending towards the water. The Narcissus Flower stands as a quiet reminder of the danger of self-obsession and the necessity of outward-looking love. In the end, Narcissus' story is not merely about vanity, but about misunderstanding love itself. It teaches that love cannot survive when it has no 'other,' and that seeing only oneself is the surest way to lose everything else.

A Restaurant Just Turned 300 Years Old

Back then, restaurants were very different than the establishments of today. Botín was a casa de comida, a house of food, meant for weary merchants and traders who peddled their goods in the nearby Plaza Mayor market, just outside the city walls. "There's a myth that people were worried that if taverns served food, the men would never go back home to their wives," says culinary anthropologist Floriana Gennari. To eat at a casa de comida, travelers would bring their own ingredients and the tavern cook would prepare a meal for them.

Botín's continuously burning, wood-fired, granite oven is practically a living artifact.

The back of the house is a scene of organized chaos where servers are ranked and the food goes through three tiers of inspection before arriving to your table.

Bulbul Joshi

Legend has it that 18th-century Romantic painter Francisco Goya was once a porter here. Ernest Hemingway set the closing scene of *The Sun Also Rises* at a table in an upstairs dining room, and the signatures of Spanish kings throughout the centuries adorn one of the walls. There is also most definitely a ghost in the wine cellar.

Sobrino de Botin, confirmed by the Guinness Book of World Records as the oldest restaurant in the world, just celebrated 300 years of scintillating history.

Opened in 1725 in the center of Madrid, it's the longest continuously running restaurant on record, they kept the soldiers fed during the Spanish Civil War, and they even stoked the flames of their 300-year-old oven every day during the Covid-19 pandemic when the world was on lockdown.

But this upscale eatery, lovingly known as Botín, is not revered for its sophisticated gastronomy. On the contrary, its food, especially the renowned slow-roasted suckling pig that Hemingway's characters ordered, and classic style are intentionally simple. "Casa Botín is about traditional flavors. We have lasted this long because we have great respect for authenticity," says Antonio González, the third-generation co-owner.

Determined to find out how a restaurant thrives and remains relevant over three centuries, I called my friend who was heading to Madrid last fall, where I uncovered the secrets of Botín's intriguing past, and what's in store for its future.

History in the making

She is a history buff, she writes, As I walked through the historic Austrias's neighbourhood and along Calle de Cuchilleros, a tree-lined street named for the knifemakers who sold their wares to local butchers as early as the 17th century, the first thing I noticed was Botín's brick facade. The four-story building, originally a private home, dates to at least 1590, not long after Phillip II moved his royal court to Madrid. In the 18th century, a man named Candido Remis took over the building and opened a tavern, naming it Sobrino de Botín, or 'nephew of Botín.' French chef Jean Botín, Remis' famous uncle by marriage, had worked in the Court of the Hapsburgs.

Back then, restaurants were very different than the establishments of today. Botín was a casa de comida, a house of food, meant for weary merchants and traders who peddled their goods in the nearby Plaza Mayor market, just outside the city walls. "There's a myth that people were worried that if taverns served food, the men would never go back home to their wives," says culinary anthropologist Floriana Gennari. To eat at a casa de comida, travelers would bring their own ingredients and the tavern cook would prepare a meal for them.

It wasn't until the 1800s that Botín became a confectionery, and then finally began calling itself a restaurant, emulating the new style of dining in France, characterized by table service and a refined menu, an indulgence meant only for the upper class. "They were actually making pastries and sweets before they started focusing on pig and meat from the land," says Gennari.

Botín remained in Remis' family until 1930, when it was sold to González's grandparents, Amparo Martín and Emilio González. They started with seven employees. In its 300-year history, Botín has been owned by only two families. "This is a huge responsibility," González admits.

The 21-day-old piglet is roasted whole with salt and lard for two to three hours, ensuring that the meat remains tender while the skin becomes golden and crisp.

#HAPPY BIRTHDAY

The four-storey building, originally a private home, dates to at least 1590.

Stepping into a living museum

Before passing through the unassuming entryway, I gazed up at the small balconies above. "One of the balconies is broken due to the shrapnel from the Spanish Civil War," says historian and tour guide Alfonso Muñoz of Walks, the only company that offers both a behind-the-scenes tour and a meal with a Botín expert.

Upon entering the ground floor dining room, featuring exposed beams, ceramic tile from Talavera de la Reina and traditional handicrafts, I immediately encountered a head waiter meticulously 'playing the Spanish violin,' the local term for artfully carving an Iberian ham leg. A few steps farther and I couldn't help but peer into the room where some of the approximately 20,000 suckling piglets served to patrons each year were splayed out on platters, ready for roasting in Botín's continuously burning, woodfired, granite oven, it's practically a living artifact. González says that the restaurant serves about 800 patrons daily, roasting about 60 whole piglets and 20 lambs every day.

As I descended the wooden steps to the musty wine cellar, the oldest part of the building, it felt as though I had walked through a time portal. There are remnants of the old confectionary and dining tables with white linen on either side of the cavernous brick-arched room. Head to the very end, and there's a secret passageway.

If you're brave enough to enter the claustrophobic space, you'll find bottles with fluffy black mold growing from the humidity, along with the hidden door to a tunnel that once connected the whole city. Muñoz explains that the tunnels provided easy access for merchants to bring in their goods, but it also served far more dire purposes. "We know that during the rule of Ferdinand VII in the 1800s, this is where liberals being chased by the government and the Inquisition used to hide," the guide says.

As one might expect, this is also where the ghost lingers, adds Muñoz. Legend has it that the spectral being is a disgruntled diner who smashed some dishes and is destined to remain in Botín's cellar for eternity as penitence.

Open since 1725, Botín still uses its original firewood oven, which crisps the skin and gives a smoky flavor to the restaurant's signature suckling pig.

But it's not just ghosts who visit Botín. Walk upstairs and you might be lucky enough to be seated at Hemingway's table. "Botín has an important relationship with writers," says González. Spanish author María Dueñas used Botín as a setting for her 2009 novel *The Time in Between*, as did Benito Pérez Galdós, who wrote about the restaurant in his 1887 work *Fortunata y Jacinta*, to name just a few.

With royalty, political figures and celebrities in the Botín guest book, its A-list reads like a red-carpet event. The Spanish royal family, King Hussein of Jordan, Jackie Kennedy, Henry Kissinger, and actors, from Antonio Banderas to Catherine Zeta-Jones, have broken bread here.

Before sitting at a table, I wandered around, stopping to read a framed letter from Nancy Reagan and admiring the famous painting *Matritum Urbs Regia* by Russian artist Pierre Schild. The piece depicts the former Royal Alcázar of Madrid before the fortress' burning in 1734, and it is thought to be one of the most accurate paintings of Madrid in that era.

The main event

Botín's history and art are only part of the story. The simple Spanish and Moorish-inspired dishes, garlic prawns, squid, partridge and seasonal gazpacho to name just a few, rely on freshness and quality rather than heavy spices, and have stood the test of time.

Much of the original menu remains. "A lot of restaurants in Spain have started to modernize and innovate, and there is a huge movement towards fusion cuisine," says Gennari. Botín's culinary choices stand out because it has taken the opposite approach.

Until the 1960s, dictator Francisco Franco kept Spain isolated from global influences, meaning eclectic, spicy food was hard to come by. Instead, the foundation of Spain's cuisine focuses on unpretentious fare and high standards. You'll get the best quality ingredients available and recipes passed down through the centuries, but there is nothing whipped, foamed or emulsified at Botín. The restaurant continues to lean into this philosophy. "The idea is that if the food is fresh, it doesn't have to be hidden under other flavors," says Gennari.

I began my meal with huevos revueltos, creamy scrambled eggs with baby asparagus and wild garlic, by far the best I've had in Spain. I chose the white, flaky hake cooked in a mild paprika sauce as my main dish, which was unassuming and melt-in-your-mouth divine.

My dining companions selected the juicy, mild lamb and the suckling piglet, which are sourced from nearby Avila and Segovia, respectively. The 21-day-old piglet is roasted whole with salt and lard for two to three hours, ensuring that the meat remains tender while the skin becomes golden and crisp. "This is the way aristocrats once ate, or those who could afford this type of food," says Muñoz. And while you might be inclined to begin munching on the giant bread rolls before your meal arrives, you're better off waiting. They're meant for sopping up the garlicky, creamy sauces. Though I could barely take another bite, the tarta de queso, also known as grandma's cheesecake, with blueberry coulis is a worthy indulgence. The smooth, creamy cheese gushes out as you sink your fork into it.

Where the real action happens

While the front of the house runs like a well-oiled machine, the back of the house is a scene of organized chaos where servers are ranked and the food goes through three tiers of inspection before arriving to your table. "Our filters are strict because our focus is the raw materials, the ingredients," says González.

The first filter is González's nephew, who's responsible for picking up the ingredients from their vendors. The second is the kitchen. If they don't approve of the quality, it's tossed. The third are the servers. "It's their obligation to accept the final results," he says. Dressed in white jackets and bow ties, the approximately 100 staff usually start at 18 to 20 years old, learning the particularities of the restaurant, including how the best oak wood is chosen for the oven. "Every server becomes a specialist in their job," says González. It's not unusual for a Botín server to spend their entire career moving up the ranks. "They've been working there for decades and are still happy to provide you with good service," adds Muñoz.

As I sat at my table sipping the last of the house rioja, the waiters were jovial, often joking with one another, adding to the festive atmosphere and making guests feel like one big family.

Looking to the future while preserving the past

González knows that the restaurant can't rest on its laurels. To commemorate 300 years of legends, intrigue and traditional Spanish cuisine, the restaurant recently hosted a celebrity-filled event. It also held a micro-storytelling contest for customers to write about their favourite Botín memories, many of which are included on its website.

This year, the restaurant has taken the leap into the digital age with a sleek new image, including an updated website and a new logo. There is a special 300th anniversary menu featuring its most iconic dishes, including baby eel, and new cocktails. "The menu has adapted without losing its identity," explains Muñoz.

While the family looks to the future, some things will never change, like their famous oven, the pride of the restaurant. It has stayed at a constant temperature for centuries because any fluctuations might cause it to crack. When I asked González how they keep the flames going without ever extinguishing them, he says, "We steal the fire from the gods," referring to the Greek myth of Prometheus, who gifted fire to humans.

The metaphor is telling. To step into Botín is to experience the evolution of human innovation and the radical creativity required to stay relevant in an ever-changing, globalized world.

González, his family, and the next generation are up for the challenge. They know that today's success doesn't promise tomorrow's.

But González makes one thing clear: "Botín has its own personality, and it has to stay that way."

rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com

González says that the restaurant serves about 800 patrons daily, roasting about 60 whole piglets and 20 lambs every day.

#GENETICS

The Discovery of the Denisovans

Immune function, skin pigmentation, and altitude adaptation in modern humans have Denisovan origins

In 2010, a groundbreaking discovery in human evolution took place in the Altai Mountains, located near the borders of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia. This discovery revealed the existence of a previously unknown group of humans called the Denisovans, named after the Denisova Cave where the initial evidence was found.

Discovery of the Denisovans

The Denisova Cave is a prehistoric site that had previously yielded evidence of Neanderthals and early modern humans. However, in 2008, researchers unearthed a small fragment of a finger bone from a young girl, along with a tooth, in a layer of sediment that was about 40,000 years old. These remains were significantly different from those of Neanderthals and modern humans. DNA extracted from the bone led to the revelation that it belonged to a distinct species of human, the Denisovans.

The name 'Denisovan' was derived from the cave's name, which was itself named after Denis, a 19th-century hermit who lived near the cave. The discovery of these mysterious remains would go on to challenge previously held ideas about human evolution.

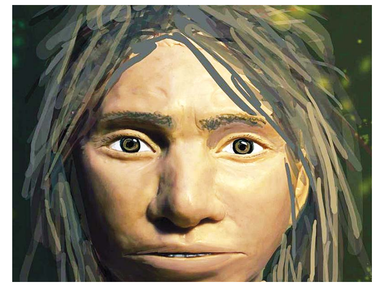
Denisovan DNA and Genetic Insights

Through detailed genetic analysis, researchers were able to extract and sequence DNA from the Denisovan remains. This was the first time that DNA had been extracted from such ancient, fragmentary remains, marking a significant achievement in paleogenomics.

The DNA revealed that the Denisovans were a distinct species or subspecies of Homo that lived alongside Neanderthals and early modern humans. Denisovans share a common ancestor with Neanderthals, and the two groups are thought to have diverged from a common lineage around 500,000 to 600,000 years ago. Genetic evidence suggests that Denisovans and Neanderthals also interbred with each other, as well as with modern humans, contributing to the genetic diversity of populations across the globe.

Physical and Cultural Traits of the Denisovans

Because the only remains initially found were a few bone fragments and teeth, much about the Denisovans' physical appearance and cultural practices remains speculative. However, through comparisons with Neanderthals and modern humans, scientists have made some educated guesses. It's believed that the Denisovans were likely physically robust, possibly similar in size to Neanderthals, though their exact features are still unclear.



Further discoveries, such as the Denisovan tooth and bone fragments, have been used to suggest that they may have had a similar tool-making culture to Neanderthals. Additionally, genetic evidence has shown that they were capable of surviving in harsh environments; traces of Denisovan DNA are found in populations living in cold regions such as Tibet, where a specific Denisovan gene variant is associated with adaptations to high altitudes and low oxygen levels. This suggests that the Denisovans, like modern humans, were capable of adapting to diverse and challenging environments.

Denisovans and Modern Humans

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Denisovan discovery is the fact that their genetic legacy is still present in many modern human populations today. People of East Asian, Southeast Asian, and Oceanian descent carry traces of Denisovan DNA, and geneticists estimate that between 4-6% of the DNA of modern humans living in Melanesia and some other populations outside of Africa can be traced back to the Denisovans. This interbreeding likely took place tens of thousands of years ago, during periods of overlap between Denisovans, Neanderthals, and early Homo sapiens in Eurasia.

Interestingly, modern humans in regions such as South Asia and parts of Southeast Asia also show genetic traces of Denisovans, which is believed to have resulted from interbreeding events that occurred as modern humans migrated out of Africa and into Eurasia. The fact that certain genes associated with immune function, skin pigmentation, and altitude adaptation in modern humans have Denisovan origins further supports the idea of interbreeding between the species.

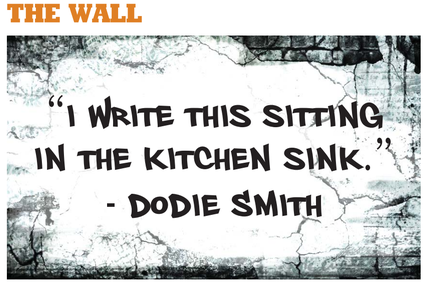
Denisovans and Neanderthals: A Complex Family Tree

The Denisovans' existence also highlights the complexity of human evolution. For many years, the idea of human evolution was portrayed as a linear progression from one species to the next, starting with early human ancestors like Australopithecus, followed by Homo habilis, Homo erectus, Neanderthals, and ultimately Homo sapiens. However, discoveries like the Denisovans have shown that human evolution was not a straightforward line, but rather a web of interactions, with different human species living alongside one another and even interbreeding. The Denisovans' relatively recent existence (they lived as recently as 40,000 years ago) makes them one of the last groups of humans before modern Homo sapiens became the dominant species on the planet. The discovery of Denisovan DNA provides a more nuanced view of human history, demonstrating how different human populations coexisted, interacted, and contributed to the genetic makeup of today's humans.

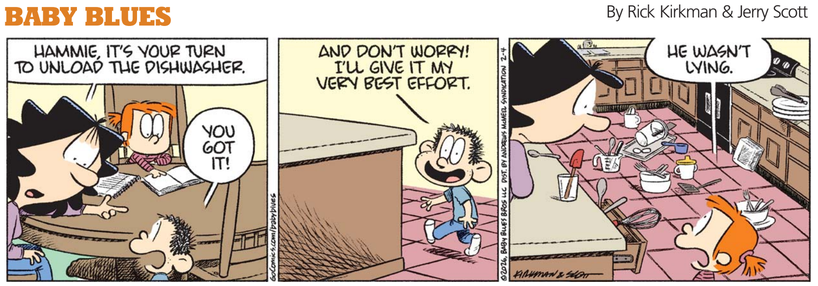
Ongoing Research

Since 2010, ongoing research into the Denisovans has uncovered more genetic evidence and shed light on their mysterious existence. In 2019, archaeologists announced the discovery of an even more complete Denisovan jawbone and teeth in the Tibetan Plateau, providing further insights into their lifestyle, appearance, and interactions with other human groups. The use of cutting-edge DNA sequencing and advanced archaeological methods continues to uncover new information about the Denisovans. Scientists are still trying to understand the full scope of their genetic influence, their cultural practices, and their relationship to other human species like Neanderthals and modern humans.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman