

# Canonical and non-canonical narrative in the basque context

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BIBLID [0212-7016 (2001), 46: 1; 325-336]

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*Artikulu honetan euskal narratibaren egungo egoeraz egiten da hausnarketa. XX mendean sendotuz joan den generoa dugu narratibazkoa eta gaur egungo euskarazko literatur produkzioan protagonismo erabatekoa du. Horretaz hitz egiten da artikuluan, narratibaren bilakaeraz eta egungo egoeraz. Guztiaren osagarri, euskal literatur sistema, euskal literaturak Espainian nahiz atzerrian duen proiektzio eskasa eta azken urteotako eleberraren joera nagusiak aztertzen dira.*

*Giltza-Hitzak: Literatur kritika. Literaturaren Historia. Euskal Literatura. Literatura Konparatua.*

*En el presente artículo se reflexiona sobre la situación actual de la literatura vasca. La narrativa es un género que ha ido fortaleciéndose durante el siglo XX y que hoy en día detenta el protagonismo absoluto en la producción de la literatura en lengua vasca. De todo ello se habla en este artículo, de la evolución de la narrativa y de su situación actual. Para completar el trabajo se estudian la escasa proyección que en España y en el extranjero tiene el sistema de literatura vasca, la literatura vasca, y las principales tendencias de la novela en estos últimos años.*

*Palabras Clave: Crítica Literaria. Historia de la Literatura. Literatura Vasca. Literatura Comparada.*

*Dans cet article, on examine la situation actuelle de la littérature basque. Le roman est un genre qui s'est affirmé durant le XX<sup>e</sup> siècle et qui détient aujourd'hui la primeur absolue dans la production de la littérature en langue basque. On parle de tout cela dans cet article, de l'évolution du roman et de sa situation actuelle. Pour compléter le travail, on étudie le peu d'envergure du système de littérature basque en Espagne et à l'étranger, la littérature basque, et les principales tendances du roman au cours de ces dernières années.*

*Mots Clés: Critique Littéraire. Histoire de la Littérature. Littérature Basque. Littérature comparée.*

When we try to sketch a panorama of current Basque literature, we always get the impression that perhaps the surprise caused by our literature or the ignorance of it weighs too much in our dissertation and brings about synopses and quotes which most of our readers are not accustomed to. We are facing one of the major problems raised by literature written in minority languages and, in the case of Basque, this becomes extreme due to the opacity of our language.

Even when we, as representatives of so-called 'peripheric' literature, attend seminars and conventions to share our concerns with colleagues from Spain and other countries, these have often more to do with 'politically correct' attitudes than with literary projects or dialogues to find future readers. As Quim Monzó<sup>1</sup> put it, in the realm of literature there are neither centres nor peripheries - all literature is centre and periphery at the same time. It depends on the approach we adopt when we refer to it. The problem is that virtually no Basque writer has reached the centre of the Spanish metropolis, with the exception, of course, of Bernardo Atxaga. I am under the impression that, contrary to what happened in recent English novels, where a series of 'regional' (Scottish, Irish or Northern English) authors have emerged during the 80's and 90's, in the case of Spain only a few periphery authors have succeeded in overcoming geographical and literary boundaries and reaching the centre. In other words, few of the aforementioned authors are considered canonical in the present Spanish literary scene. Among them, nowadays only one Basque author (Atxaga), a couple of Galician authors (Rivas, Suso de Toro) and a few Catalan writers (Moncada, Monzó, Riera) can be mentioned in the context of guaranteeing a hypothetical Spanish literary plurality. But the question remains: have the institutional elements linked to literature (University, literary prizes, political presence, relationship to the media) reflected this reality? I do not think so. Presently, to give an example, it is easier to study some of the authors from the periphery at an American university than at a Spanish one. Incredible as it may seem, currently in Spanish university departments, there is scarcely room for that kind of approach. The same thing happens, for instance, in the Spanish media. When, given that I had to study the response to Bernardo Atxaga's work in Spanish and European written media<sup>2</sup> for my doctoral thesis, I had the chance to observe the great ignorance existing in Spain about literature written in Basque and about our culture as a whole. Surprisingly, the information that some reviews conveyed to readers from Cáceres, the Balearic Islands or Castilla was not so different from that offered in different countries to Finnish, German or Italian readers. Such information included data on the Basque language, the number of speakers, the territory, traditions... that is, data which is mostly too elementary. Lastly, if we analyse those having received different literary prizes and especially the National Literature Prize in its diverse sections, it is more than evident that the list of peripheric authors is very short and that, in the case of Basque, the list includes only one author. We insist, we are

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1. see Pfeiffer, M., *El destino de la literatura*, El Acantilado, Barcelona, 1999, 46.

2. see Olaziregi, M.J., 1998a, "Bernardo Atxaga: el escritor deseado", *Insula* 623, november 1998, 7-11.

not trying to claim 'politically correct' attitudes but rather wish to denounce some of the (extraliterary) factors which could increase the isolation of Basque literary works. The fact is that, as the historian Ludger Mees recently said, apart from the problem of terrorism, the news items which Europeans associate with the Basque environment are almost always negative. Even the cold front announcing rain comes mostly from the Bay of Biscay! But irony apart, the truth is that, of the world-class Basque artists (Chillida, Oteiza...), only a few belong to the world of literature.

## THE BASQUE LITERARY SYSTEM: AN ISLAND

I think the term 'isolation' defines accurately one of the major problems that the present Basque literary system faces. During the presentation organised by the Association of Basque Language Publishers at the latest Frankfurt Book Fair, one of our most interesting authors, Harkaitz Cano (1975), introduced a text which is illustrative of our argument. Taking as a starting point the verses by the English poet W.H. Auden in his *Letters from Iceland*, Cano spoke of the loneliness of Basque literature and compared it to the loneliness that islands suffer: 'Why am I always alone?', quoted Cano.

Although the fact of writing in a pre-Indoeuropean language which has about 700,000 speakers should not be a major obstacle for our literary system, the reality is that our literature is little known and poorly understood outside our borders. And, since we are talking about islands and have mentioned Iceland, it would be good to remember that the Icelanders who attended the last Galeusca convention (Lekeitio, October 2000) told us that, even though they are a community of no more than 300,000 speakers, quite a few Icelandic writers had succeeded in connecting with readers in other languages, and one of them even won the Nobel Prize in 1955.

I suppose that, besides the extraliterary reasons that have been mentioned in passing, we would have to search for the reasons for this isolation in the Basque literary system itself. In this sense, it is obvious that if we understand the Basque literary system as the structure embracing the *production, mediation, reception and recreation* of texts in Basque, the aspects of mediation and reception are the least developed. Although the fact that more books are being published seems to indicate that people read in Basque more than ever, several sociological studies carried out into reading habits<sup>3</sup> reveal that reading is, most of the time, a compulsory subject. Few writers go beyond school circuits, and for that reason, reading for the sheer pleasure that a book offers is undoubtedly one of the most important 'musts' in our literary system. Be this as it may, the sensation we have that too much is published is perhaps more true than we think, as in the case of Basque, the number of writers in such a reduced linguistic community is

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3. see Olaziregi, M.J., "Aproximación sociológica a los hábitos de lectura de la juventud vasca", *Oihenart. Cuadernos de Lengua y Literatura* 18, 2000, 79-93.

remarkable. Julio Caro Baroja used to say that the problem in Spain is not that we do not like to read, but that we are so busy writing that we have no time left for reading what others write. In my opinion, this would be an accurate diagnosis of one of the problems in our literary system: the abundance of writers when compared with the amount of hypothetical readers.

As regards *production*, we can state that, the beginning of the democratic era did not bring about any drastic change in the Basque literary paradigms of that time. What it did bring about was the possibility of creating the objective conditions for the institutionalisation of Basque literature as an autonomous activity. I am talking about the Law to Regulate the Use of Basque (1982), the passing of which allowed, amongst other things, the implementation of bilingual teaching models or the publication of conditions for subsidies to publishing in Basque. Thanks to these subsidies, new publishers emerged and Basque publishing production increased remarkably. If an average of 31.5 books were published every year during the 1876-1975 period, from 1976 to 1994 we soared to an average of 600 books per year. Presently, about 1,400 titles are published every year. In addition, according to the most recent data from the Association of Basque Language Publishers, the network of publishers in the Basque territory includes around 100 companies, most of which have less than four employees on average. As regards another major element on the production side, i.e., the writers, it has to be said that out of the 300 people making up this group, 90% are men and only 10% are women. Their average age is around fifty, and only 6% rely exclusively on writing for a living. In a literary market as small as the Basque one, it is hard to live by writing alone, and in most cases writers have to combine their creative work with journalism, teaching and the like. To complete this limited overview of the production side of things, stress has to be put on the importance of translators' work in the consolidation of a Basque literary language.

But if nowadays reading Shakespeare or Joyce in Basque is extremely recommendable, the translations of our literature into other languages have not known the same success. The well-known line from the work of the Basque poet J.M. Iparraguirre, and the motto of the University of the Basque Country, 'Eman ta zabal zazu' [*produce and then spread around*], has yet to be realized in the case of literature written in Basque. In this sense, it is important to remember that, as far back as 1960, the prestigious linguist Koldo Mitxelena (1915-87), in his paper, 'Asaba zaarren baratza' [*Our Ancestors' Orchard*], defended the need and importance –for reasons of survival– of the translation of works written in Basque into other languages. Mitxelena's shrewd diagnosis has been shared by others, and another renowned philologist, Ibon Sarasola, has denounced the 'Sinn Fein [*us alone*] Syndrome' that our literature is suffering from and called for the need to go beyond those constraints.

According to sociologist Juan Mari Torrealdai's data [see *Euskal kultura gaur*, Jakin, 1997:377], the number of books translated from Basque into other languages could amount to 50, distributed in 150 editions. In this data the translation of books is included, but fragments or anthologies, which

would probably boost the number of translations significantly are not included. To mention a few examples, there is the case of the well-known poem by Bilbao-born Gabriel Aresti (1933-75) called 'Nire aitaren etxea' [*My Father's House*], which has been translated into over five hundred languages, according to Xabier Kintana, or the short story anthology issued by the Polish publishing house Rebis in April 2000. Leaving aside translations into the languages of the Iberian peninsula, we know that around ten Basque authors are being translated into other European languages. Bernardo Atxaga is by far the most translated author. But there is another fact which is important as regards the reception and diffusion of translated Basque works, i.e., the American and European publishing houses that release them. As it happens, contrary to what happened in Atxaga's case, most of the publishers which have issued translated works by Basque authors are small, marginal companies or have low capacity for distribution. Without entering into the discussion on the quality of the translations, this is what happened to the English versions of *Leturiaren egunkari ezkutua* [Leturia's Secret Diary] or *100 metres*, works which are considered canonical by Basque critics and which have had no response whatsoever abroad.

I suppose that the fact of Basque institutions not having subsidised the translation of books written in Basque until the year 2000 might have had to do with this situation. Much in the same way, the weakness of the *mediation* factor may have been influential. In this sense, we must remember that, besides the virtual inexistence of literary agencies until well into the 90's, the weakness of Basque literary criticism, academic or public, is also to blame (see N. Frye). Although the emergence in 1981 of the first generation with a degree in Basque Philology has contributed with a series of doctoral theses encouraging the development of more profound research into our literature, a public critique, that is, one taking place in the mass media or in popular publications, is still scarce. Besides, most of the time an important flaw shows itself: the lack of a critical attitude, the reason proffered being the impossibility to criticise within such a small territory where everybody knows each other.

## THE INSULAR NATURE OF THE BASQUE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL

J.L. Borges used to say that British literature is of an insular nature, meaning that it is made up of individuals rather than schools. We could argue the same thing about the complex and multifarious current scene in Basque fiction. Even accepting the difficulty involved in describing accurately the prevailing tendencies in our most recent production, I shall try to describe the main lines in present Basque fiction, and then focus on the work by authors who, in my opinion, are the best representatives of the general characteristics of that production.

And since I shall be referring to production of novels, I would like to point out that the choice of this genre is due to two main reasons. First, the protagonism of narrative within current literary production (almost 60% of what

is published could be assigned to this genre<sup>4</sup>). And secondly, the preeminence within this production of the novel genre. Much as in the case of Spanish literature from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Basque literary activity also pivots around the novel. Nowadays, this is the genre with most feedback and literary prestige and the most profitable genre. So it is not surprising that storywriters of high quality such as I. Mujika Iraola, renowned verse-singers like A. Egaña, university teachers like L. Oñederra or L. Mintegi, journalists like J. Luis Zabala or children's book writers like P. Zubizarreta or Jesus M<sup>º</sup> Olaizola have embarked upon the adventure of writing novels. Besides, I want to stress that in some of the above mentioned examples, venturing into the novel genre has proved to be a very good idea, as the quality of two (first) novels published in 1999 shows: *Gerezi denbora* [Cherry Time] by I. Mujika Iraola and *Eta emakumeari sugeak esan zion* [And the Serpent Said to the Woman] (2000) [Sp. version: *Y la serpiente dijo a la mujer*, Ed. Bassarai, 2000], the latter having been awarded, amongst other prizes, the Critics' Prize and the Euskadi Prize 2000.

At any rate, if the preeminence of the novel is unquestionable now, we do not have to go a very long way back in our recent literary history to corroborate the importance that another narrative genre, the short story, had during the 80's. The socio-literary reasons which might have brought about this increase have often been pointed out. Amongst them we can name the proliferation at the time of literary magazines which served as real launching platforms for many authors, or the increase in the creation of literary prizes awarded by a series of Basque town councils and institutions. The consequences of this proliferation of short story writing were very interesting for the Basque literary scene, as Atxaga's or Sarrionaindia's stories carried us to fantastic and imaginary worlds which were, up to then, non-existent in prose written in our language.

By the time the modernization and renovation of the Basque short story reached its peak during the 80's, the Basque novel had progressed very fast and very far in a few decades. Emerging at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the poetics centered on regional customs prevailed until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. As it happens, neither modernity nor the revolution in the novel brought about by Modernism reached our shores until 1957. It was from the 50's onwards that our prose started to progress, influenced by the techniques of European writers who during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century discovered a new human dimension for us and spoke of a world which was more and more difficult to grasp. We are referring to the irony underlying texts by Conrad or Mann, the tragicomedy present in works by Ibsen or Pirandello, the parody element in the works of Eliot or Joyce, or the aesthetic fragmentation in Proust and Woolf... We are referring, thus, to all those who subverted literary language and appropriated E. Pound's motto *Make it new!*

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4. This protagonism has increased incessantly as the century drew on. I think that the following data is rather eloquent in this sense: if during the period from 1876 to 1935 only 18.7% of the literary texts published in Basque belonged to the narrative genre, from 1936 to 1975 that percentage rose to 23.8%, and during the period 1976-1996 it soared to 48.5%.

Therefore, a major consequence of the modernisation taking place in the Basque novel is that any approach must be made using comparatist literary parameters. That is why, even though we have defined the Basque literary system as an island, we would have to now qualify the statement by saying that it is an island where many ships have arrived, but from which few have set sail. TS. Eliot said that authors from all times and all languages are contemporary with each other and, in a way, kinsfolk. That is to say that no writer is isolated, but writes 'for contrast and comparison, among the dead', trying to balance the tension between what is strictly private and what is universal. That very tension has allowed us to be universal while at the same time remaining genuinely Basque<sup>5</sup>.

As said above, the Existentialist novel *Leturiaren egunkari ezkutua* [Leturia's Secret Diary] (1957), by J.L. Alvarez Enparantza, also known as 'Txillardegí', marks the beginning of modernity in the Basque novel. As A. Roquentin in *La nausée* (1938), Leturia depicts in his diary the absence of human existence, reflecting on the crucial issues in Existentialism: loneliness, failure, death, having to take decisions... All these topics were present again in the two novels Txillardegí wrote during the 60's. A few years later, in 1969, with the publication of *Egunero hasten delako* [Because It Starts Everyday], writer Ramon Saizarbitoria forced a radical turn within the novel scene, leaving on the side Existentialist poetics for an experimental novel close to French *Nouveau Roman*. On entering this new period, the novelistic form and experimentation prevail in the literary universe of the authors of that time, and avantgarde texts such as *Sekulorum sekulotan* [For Ever And Ever] (1975) by Patricio Urkizu, *Zergatik bai* (Because I Say So) (1976) by Koldo Izagirre and *Ziutateaz* (On the City) (1976) by Bernardo Atxaga will once again remind us of that premise of Barthes that technique is coessential to the novel. This display of formality reached its climax in 1976, when R. Saizarbitoria's *Ene Jesus!* [My God!] was published, a novel close to the poetics of silence, a result of the modern crisis of representation. A few years later, the exhaustion of experimentalism was patent and the avantgardist euphoria faded away.

Nevertheless, during the 70's, not all was experimentation, and novels with a social message or those of an allegorical nature tried to broaden the existing supply. I am referring to the social novels that writer and publisher X. Gereño brought out at the end of the 60's and at the beginning of the 70's (novels which, by the way, have been considered as subliterate by some critics<sup>6</sup>), or those of a member of the Basque Language Academy, Txomin Peillen, who combined the social novel and the thriller; or works by X. Amuriza... or allegoric novels trying to circumvent Franco's censorship, such

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5. In his outstanding essay *Gogoa zubi* (Alberdania, 1999), writer Anjel Lertxundi makes some interesting reflections on the subject.

6. Gereño himself has recently mentioned how interesting for him are the models such as those of Ken Follet, Robin Cook and John Grisham, all of them authors of well-known and profitable best-sellers.

as *Haurgintza minetan* [Labour Pains] (1973) by Mikel Zarate and *Ajea du Urturik* [Urturi's Worries] (1971) by Anjel Lertxundi. Two years later, in 1973, Lertxundi published a new autobiographical novel, close to Italian Neo-realism and, in our opinion, one of the most interesting novels written in the 70's. This is the novella *Goiko kale* [Upper Street], which recently has been re-published by Alberdania.

As in Literature from neighbouring countries, after the experimental phase, the Basque novel recovered the taste for narration. During the last decades, texts have followed the postmodern premise that 'all has been told, but we have to remember it'. The return to narration started, according to critic J.M. Lasagabaster, with the preeminence of lyricism and inner worlds in some novels dating from the end of the 70's and the beginning of the 80's. This lyrical approach includes typologies as diverse as the psychological novel and even the lyric or poematic novel, and among its followers we would mention the lyric novel *Haizeaz bestaldetik* [From Beyond the Wind] (1979) by Txillardegui; the autobiographical *Abuztuaren 15eko bazkalondoa* [Sp. version: *La sobremesa del 15 de agosto*, Ed. Hiru, 1994] by J.A. Arrieta; the intimist text, close to the 'feminism of difference' from the 70's *Zergatik, panpox?* [Sp. version: *¿Por qué, Panpox?*, Ed. Orain, 1995] by A. Urretabizkaia... but also more recent novels, such as the oniric novel *Hatza mapa gainean* [The Finger on the Map] (1988) by Pello Lizarralde; *Arinagoda duk airea, Absalon* (1990) [Sp. version: *Más leve que el viento, Absalón*, Ed. Vosa, 1993] by F. Juaristi; or Juan Luis Zabala's novels *Zigarrokin ziztrin baten azken keak* [Last puffs from a cigarette butt] (1985) and *Kaka espilikatzen* [Logorrhea] (1989), the latter reflecting Handke's symbolic realism or the omnipresent desperation in T Bernhard.

Besides the lyric-style novels, the taste for narrating also brought about an increase in detective stories published during the 80's. The more and more obvious commercialisation of literature favoured the emergence of genre novels. The goal was, above all, to seduce the reader using narrative strategies in order to provide the suspense in doses. As happened during the 70's in Spanish literature, with the publication of novels by M. Vázquez Montalbán, new writers of Basque fiction tried to follow the line opened in 1955 by the first detective story ever written in Basque, *Hamabost egun Urgain'en* [A fortnight in Urgain] by J.A. Loidi. At any rate, I think the statement should be qualified by saying that rather than strictly detective stories, what predominated during the 80's was the incorporation of narrative techniques and strategies typical of the novelesque genre. Besides what has been said, we would like to stress the little attention critics have paid to this genre in our country: apart from the doctoral thesis which writer-translator Javi Cillero has recently defended at Nevada University in Reno (USA) or the book on this novel type<sup>7</sup> that writer and teacher G. Garate recently published, few studies have analysed the repercussion that the genre has had on our

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7. see Garate, G., *Atzerriko eta Euskal Herriko polizia eleberria* [Detective Stories In the World And In The Basque Country], Donostia, Elkarlanean, 2000.



most recent novels. If the community of Basque critics has not canonized this sort of novel, readers have indeed enjoyed them. Works such as *110 Streeteko geltokia* [110<sup>th</sup> Street Station] (1985) by I. Zabaleta or *Alaba* [The Daughter] (1984) by G. Garate are among the most republished and read novels in recent times<sup>8</sup>. Last but not least, I think that in this group of detective stories received with enthusiasm by Basque readers we would have to include translations published during the last decades by Igela and other publishers. From D. Hammett to Chandler, McCoy, Thompson or Cain, the narrative techniques of this genre have helped to improve recent Basque creations.

If we look back at the production written in Basque, we see that the list of detective stories in its different forms (*intrigue or mystery stories, roman noir and spy stories*) would include a great number of titles. In addition, one fact is evident: if, in most novels published in the 70's, linguistic concerns and classic *whodunnit* English models prevailed, from the 80's onwards elements from contemporary thriller literature and the American *roman noir* have been incorporated. To name but the best known detective stories, we should mention, apart from the above, *Izurri berria* [The New Pest] (1984) by G. Garate; the police trilogy by woman writer I. Borda, who tries to subvert traditional roles and introduces a woman detective: *Bakean ützi arte* [Until They Leave Us Alone] (1984), *Bizi nizano munduan* [While I Live] (1996) and *Amorezko pena baño* [More Than a Heartbreak] (1996); *Ti Marbuta* (1984) by X. Kintana; *Mugetan* [On the Borderline] (1989) by H. Etxeberria; *Speed gauak* [Speed Nights] (1990) by E. Jimenez; *Non dago Stalin?* [Where is Stalin?] (1991) by X. Montoia; the three mystery and spy novels published by J.M. Velez de Mendizabal over the 90's: *Yehuda* (1992), *Moskuko gereziak* [Moscow Cherries] (1996) and *Samurai berria* [The New Samurai] (1999); the spy novel *Izua hemen* [Fear Here] (1991) by J.M. Iturralde; the excellent *Ur uherrak* [Sp. Version: *Agua turbia*, Ed. Hiru, 1995] by A. Epaltza; prize-winning psychological thriller *The lone man* (1993) by Bernardo Atxaga; the disturbing mystery novel *Kate begi galdua* [The Missing Link] (1996) by Jon Alonso; or the intriguing *Beluna Jazz* (1996) and *Pasaia Blues* (1999) by Harkaitz Cano.

## RURALIST NOVELS, URBAN NOVELS... AND OTHER TOPOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATIONS

Some critical approaches to contemporary Basque novels have described these as ruralist works in which there was a clear topological displacement when compared with previously published novels. The titles we are referring to include novels which take on the narrative techniques of detective stories and novels of intrigue, such as *Hamaseigarrenean aidanez* [It Happened on the Sixteenth] (1983) and *Tobacco Days* (1987) by Anjel Lertxundi; or the trilogy by P. Aristi including *Kcappo (tempo di tremolo)* (1985), *Irene (tempo di*

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8. see M.J. Olaziregi, 2000, *op. cit.*

*adagio*) (1987) and *Krisalida* (1990); or fantasy-style novels such as *Bi anai* [Two Brothers] (1985) [Sp. version: *Dos hermanos*, Ed. Flip, 1995] by Bernardo Atxaga and the magic realism in *Babilonia* (1989) [Sp. version, Ed. Acento, 1999] by J.M. Irigoien.

Most of the above mentioned ruralist novels still seduce a great many of Basque readers, and the excellent critical acclaim they received bears witness to their quality. Such is the case of *Hamase igarrene an aidanez*, a modern novel in which A. Lertxundi, following C. Pavese's steps, tried to show us a not at all Arcadian picture of the Basque rural world. I also find worth mentioning Atxaga's lovely novella *Two Brothers*, now translated into six languages, in which the author sketched the mythical world of Obaba. Together with these, a special mention must be made of *Babilonia*, a polyphonic voice concert in which J.M. Irigoien tried to merge the ruralist novel. The story focused on the Carlist Wars and the interpretations of Basque culture by different anthropologists. The long and renowned career of J.M. Irigoien includes, apart from the above mentioned novel, a whole series of works close to Latin American magic realism (especially close to García Márquez and Rulfo), among which the innovative *Polie droaren hostoak* (Polyhedron Leaves) (1982) [Sp. version: *La tierra y el viento*, Ed. Hiru, 1997) and the more realistic *Udazkenaren balkoitik* (From Autumn's Balcony) (1987) stand out.

And speaking of realism, it should be stressed that looking to the exterior has prevailed in the creation of the most recent narrative works. It is a realism which is extended by new perspectives and points of view, by its creative projection or by its formal treatment. This looking to the outside has caused the proliferation of novels pivoting around historical-political events which have been important in our contemporary history. The Civil War and the post-war period, for instance, make up the central plot in novels such as: *Euzkadi meretziz zuten* [They Deserved a Country Called Euzkadi] (1984) by Koldo Izagirre, *Izua hemen* [Fear Here] (1990) by Joxemari Iturralde, *Loitzu herrian udapartean* (1993) by Luis Mari Mujika, *Badena dena da* [What It Is, It Is] (1995) by Patxi Zabaleta, *Zozte hemendik!* [Get Away!] (1995) by Patricio Urkizu or *Bihotz bi. Gerrako kronikak* (1998) [Sp. version: *Amor y guerra*, Espasa y Calpe, 1999] by Ramon Saizarbitoria.

The problems derived from the existence of ETA, as critic I. Aldekoa stressed, is another element common to many of the novels published during the last decades. Thus, during the 70's and 80's, we have the novels *Hil ala bizi* [To Die or To Live] (1973) by Xabier Amuriza, *100 metro* (1976) [Sp. version: *Cien metros*, Ed. Nuestra Cultura, 1976] by Ramon Saizarbitoria, *Grand Placen aurkituko gara* (1983) [Sp. version: *Grande Place*, Ed. Akal, 1985] by Mario Onaindia, *Exkixu* (1988) by Txillardegui, *Mugetan* (1989) by Hasier Etxeberria. Together with these, we will mention some more recently published works: *Etorriko haiz nirekin?* [Will You Come With Me?] (1991) by Mikel Hernández Abaitua, *The lone man* (1993) and *The lone woman* (1995) by Bernardo Atxaga, *Nerea eta biok* (1994) [Nerea and I] by Laura Mintegi, *Hamaika pauso* (1995) (Sp. version: *Los pasos incontables*, Espasa Calpe, 1998) by Ramon Saizarbitoria, *Berriro igo nauzu* [I've Gone Up Again] by

Xabier Mendiguren Elizegi and *Arian ari* [Without a Break] (1996) by Patxi Zabaleta. At any rate, I think it is important to point out that most of the approaches made regarding terrorist violence try to go deep into personal experience, the internal fracture produced in characters facing a violent reality, rather than giving a naturalistic account of events. Probably due to the fact that Basque reality and media belligerence are sufficiently eloquent and dramatic, Basque fiction writers have preferred to tell us the tragic experience of the reality that has been our destiny.

In any case, it is obvious that the concept of realism is a jumble where many types of novel are included. To give but a couple of examples, from the novels mentioned in the previous paragraph, the poetic distance between *Exkixu* and *Hamaika pauso* would be huge. If the former might be closer to critical and social realism, the latter is rather a testimonial novel. But what definitely makes them so different is their literary style. As it could not be otherwise, the work by Ramon Saizarbitoria, considered the great innovator in Basque fiction, shows a full display of narrative strategies, meta-narrative and an intertextuality which is so obvious that they make the text an attractive palimpsest. The same techniques and literary obsessions are present in the author's next novel, *Bihotz bi* (1999), though it shows a lower level of complexity.

To complete this realistic section, we would like to mention works such as *Agirre zaharraren kartzelaldi berriak* [Old Agirre's New Imprisonments] (1999) by Koldo Izagirre, where realism and fantasy go hand in hand in a story qualified by the author himself as a quasi-burlesque farce.

To finish this rapid overview of the current situation of the Basque novel, we would like to point out how little incidence the historical genre has had amongst us. The historical approach started by J. Etxaide during the 50's has had few followers, and among them we would have to mention *Gillen Garateako batxilerra* [Sp. version: *La tau y el caldero*, Ed. Grijalbo, 1985] by M. Onaindia, *Nafarroako artizarra* [Navarre's Polestar] (1984) by J.M. Iturralde, *Herioaren itzalpeetan* [In the Shadows of Death] by A. Eguzkitza (1999), *Putzu* (1999) by Txillardegi and P Zabaleta's novels *Ukoreka* (1994), *Badena dena da* [What It Is, It Is] (1995), *Arian ari* [Without a Break] (1996) and *Errolanen harria* [Roland's Stone] (1998).

#### FINAL REMARKS: GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BASQUE NOVEL AT THE END OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

1. Eclecticism. According to postmodern thought, anything is valid and everything coexists on an equal level in the present Basque novel. Consequently, it is difficult to assign the texts to a specific kind of poetics or typology.

If there is a contemporary Basque writer who can represent a continuous experimentation leading to formal eclecticism, it is Anjel Lertxundi. In previous references to his artistic development we have already given examples

of this experimental vitality, and have mentioned his beginnings in the realm of the allegoric novel during the 70's and his more realistic approach in the 80's. After these novels, the author's evolution as a writer of fiction has drifted towards literary universes which are not inspired by real facts or events, but by simple literary speculation. We embark upon a literary journey, an intertextual journey which is influenced by different poetic traditions. The novels *Otto Pette: hilean bizian bezala* [Sp. version.: *Las últimas sombras*, Seix Barral, 1996] and *Azkenaz beste* [Sp. version: *Un final para Nora*, Alfaguara, 1999] may serve as examples.

2. Another feature in Basque narrative at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is defined by the fact that barriers between genres are more and more blurred. A good example of what we are saying here is *Kamenbert helburu* [Camembert Target] (1998) by Jon Alonso, a text which is a mixture of essay and novel... or the excellent *Groenlandiako lezioa* [Sp. version: *Lista de locos y otros alfabetos*, Siruela, 1998] by Bernardo Atxaga, winner of the 1999 Euskadi Prize.
3. The weight of the autobiographical genre and the author's consciousness is more and more present. Personal and interpersonal problems predominate. Novels such as *Koaderno gorria* [The Red Copy Book] (1998) by A. Urretabizkaia, *Eta emakumeari sugeak esan zion* [And the Serpent said to the Woman] (1999) by L. Oñederra, *Arrainak ura baino* [More Than Anything Else] (1999) by H. Etxeberria, *Ez* [No] (1999) by M. Ertzilla, or *Edo zu edo ni* [Either You or Me] (2000) by I. Rozas are good examples of what we mean.
4. We will finish with a short reference to the emergence in the last few years of new women writers in the Basque publishing market, which so far has been peopled by men. Recently, new women narrators have been added to the world of the renowned writers, such as, Arantxa Urretabizkaia, Mariasun Landa, Itxaro Borda, Laura Mintegi or Arantxa Iturbe... In this new group of women writers of fiction Lourdes Oñederra, Ana Urkiza or Ixiar Rozas can be included.

In Lancaster (U.K), on 29-3-2001.

Lecture given at the *Peripheral Identities in the Iberian Context* (Lancaster University)