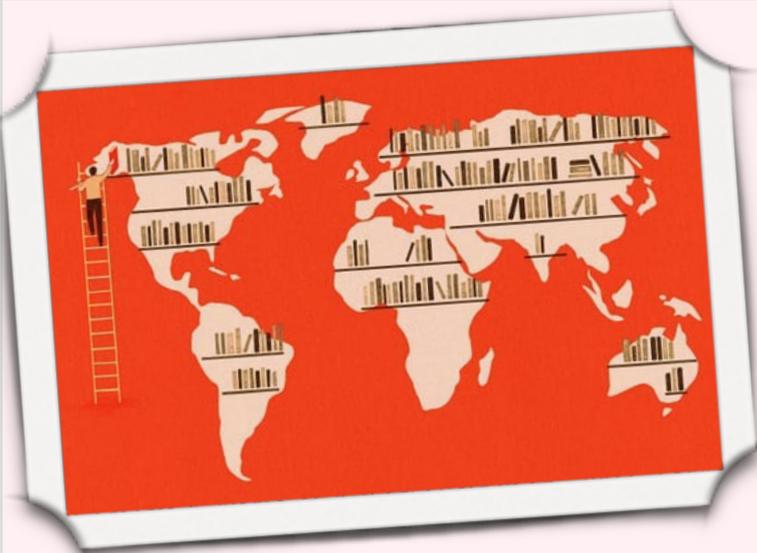




Basque Writing 19

WRITING IN A SMALL LANGUAGE



This 19th edition of Basque Writing is very special for us. This time, we have gathered some of our most prominent authors and asked them a broad question: how does being a writer of a minority language like ours feel when, for example, you meet authors of bigger languages? In a world that is becoming more and more globalised, the writers too need to travel constantly: to take part in readers' clubs, participate in talks and literature fairs, advertise their books and translations and for many other reasons.

We have gathered seven creatives who write in Basque and whose work has been translated into several languages. They are authors that have presented and defended their work both at home and abroad. In the following pages, you'll find the words of Itxaro Borda, Bernardo Atxaga, Laura Mintegi, Kirmen Uribe, Karmele Jaio, Harkaitz Cano and Mariasun Landa. No matter what format is used to compile them, it is a real treat to have the opportunity to read their words all together. What is more we do know that, fortunately, there were many other authors who could have been chosen to answer this question as there are more and more writers who have their work translated into Spanish, French, English, Dutch, Russian and many other languages.

In the middle of this mammoth market and industry, some titles that were originally written in Basque and later translated into other languages have made a decent space for themselves. Receiving excellent reception or being awarded in places

such as England, Germany, Spain or USA was a very rare event until very recently. Every so often, we used to hear the distant sounds of the rewards that Bernardo Atxaga's or Mariasun Landa's work was reaping abroad, we would hear about Itxaro Borda's publications and recitals or news about Laura Mintegi's work being translated in the USA came to our ears. However, in very few years, a new generation provided and enriched our literature with their own voice, and so is happening with the generation that has come after that as well. Their work soaks us in fascination here at home and makes splashes in distant lands.

Literature is literature in both a tiny language and the hugest language with the fiercest market. They all have a voice of their own and we celebrate this, as variety is the spice of life. But the perspective and proximity is different when the community that first consumes your work is only formed by thousands of readers, when your community ends up permanently eclipsed by two or three bigger languages. In fact, trips do not always mean travelling far away, as you could find remoteness in your own neighbourhood; in the Basque Country, you could easily find people in your family or group of friends that do not speak any Basque. They know what you do, what they don't know what it is like, what it is about or how you do it.

It is about those realities that these seven authors will reflect on in this Basque Writing. How they look at the world from a very particular perspective, from Basque language. However, we know thanks to all the people that we have met in PEN throughout all these years that this perspective is as universal as particular, as many other writers in Europe and all around the world live similar experiences, creating from the smallness of their language, even from the minoritisation of their language, but always keeping their own voice. In fact, we are sure that these voices will sound familiar to many of you who are far away from us; since our small language, as well as all other small and big languages, is a tool that serves for relating the whole world.



Urtzi Urrutikoetxea
Basque PEN



My affective tongue and literary language

In these lines, I will recount the meandering path that took me to choose Basque as my literary language. I will detail my personal bond with Basque, the consequences of having learnt it late and the vicissitudes of my literary journey in the world of Basque modern children's literature. I will try to explain the reason which urged me to learn this minority language as an adult, which personal motivations urged me to do so and why I became hooked on that process even though the moments of despair were not few.

Even though I have always wanted to be writer, in my case, choosing Basque as my literary language could be considered a consequence of the historic events around the Basque resistance against Franco's dictatorship, as recovering the language was one of the objectives of the that resistance. That is to say, my career as a Basque writer, just like many others' in my generation, is closely related to the context of our language, with its socio-political status, with a certain approach to cultural and political engagement, although it should be pointed out that each of us had a different approach in that respect.

I had to learn Basque on my own, which doesn't mean that my parents didn't speak or use it or that I didn't hear it when I was a child, it is just that they didn't transmit it to me. They preferred that I spoke Spanish, that's all. All that was part of our context as losers of the civil war in the post-war period, an efficient repressive tool employed by the francoist regime. Therefore, unlike those prominent Basque writers whose family's language was Spanish or French without the slightest doubt, I have never considered myself totally non-native when it comes to Basque. Basque sociolinguistics often apply to a wider group than we would initially think, especially if we take into consideration the characteristics of the political and historical moment in which our generation grew up: Fraco's regime. However, as far back as I can remember, I have always spoken in Spanish, even though it's worth noting that my speech was full of Basque words.



MARIASUN LANDA

Juantxo Egaña

On both lexical and syntactical levels, Basque has been part of our Spanish speech, and even so, this fact did not relieve the devastating feeling that that reality aroused in me during my childhood: in my family circle, sometimes, people spoke a language that I didn't not understand or, even if I understood, could not speak. I remember being interested in that language from a very young age, I remember wanting to learn that language that had a close relation with my family, intimately linked to a people that had been stepped on and asphyxiated in a war that you could feel even if it was never mentioned.

I will not delve deeply to describe what those dark years meant for Basque language, but I would like you to understand that the knowledge that I acquired in school, the books that I read and all my cultural references were in Spanish, and that that circumstance prevents me from, among other things, being able to talk to my grandfather. I used to sit next to him, we would play cards, but I don't remember having a conversation with him, ever. I will dare to label that feeling of frustration and emptiness that someone feels when they can't speak a language that they love, and I will call it "linguistic wound", since I experienced it like an actual internal suffering with a touch of guilt.

I lived and studied in Paris for four years, which opened to me the door to discovering French culture and literature and increased my knowledge and experiences in such a way that I still feel indebted to that city. However, I always knew that that voyage had a return ticket, and so it was.

Learning Basque, that affective tongue, was a matter that remained unresolved at the end on my childhood and youth.

It seemed indispensable in order to introduce myself to the Basque reality.

And that is how I would resume the meandering path that made me become a Basque writer, a writer who writes in Basque, which is my heart's language. Even though Spanish and French have been, and still are, my other two languages, the ones that are probably closer to my reasoning.



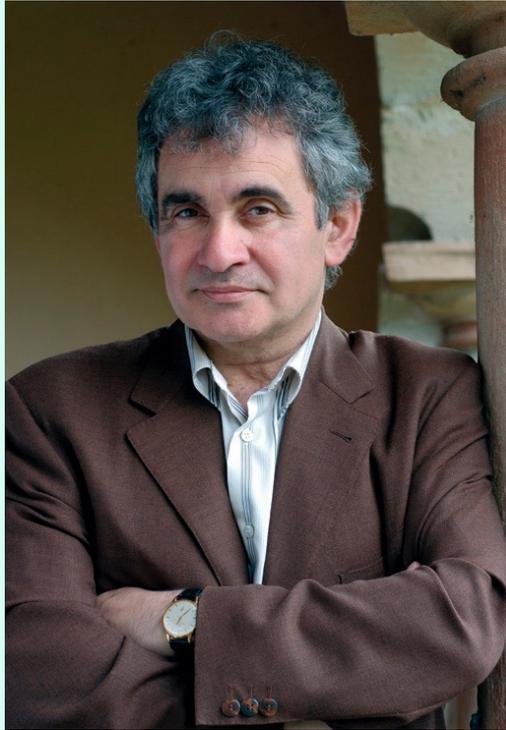
A note on the Thalegraph

The tragelaph or hircocervus was, and continues to be, a rare creature, a mixture of billy goat and stag, a mythical animal symbolically related to chimera and to false hope. Throughout history it has been mentioned by only a few writers, but, fortunately for me – as a bilingual Basque writer – one such mention appears in the prologue to *The Impossible Made Possible*, the first grammar of the Basque language, published by Manuel de Larramendi in 1729. I quote:

‘...reducing the Basque language to a method and to a system of rules has, up until now, been considered an impossibility, not only by the ignorant, but also by scholars, not only by foreigners, but also by the Basques themselves, and even today, there are a thousand doubters who judge that Art and the Basque language are contradictory terms, even more contradictory than the tragelaph. Such delusions are commonplace.’

This is where we stood at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and that is where we still stand, we Basque writers writing in two languages, for we are still seen as rare beasts, tragelaphs attempting the double somersault, hurling ourselves headfirst into Basque, then rebounding from Basque into Castilian or French. A terrible situation? Not at all. Let me say at once: the tragelaphs do not live in paradise, along with the stags, lions and parrots captured, let’s say, by Jan Brueghel in a painterly snapshot, but they are, generally speaking, happier than monolingual writers or than bilingual writers who do not have a minority language as one of their two languages. Some will say this is an outrageous statement, and that I’m allowing myself to be carried away by some Romantic illusion, overstating the benefits of my cultural situation. ‘Go on, tragelaph,’ they will hiss, ‘blow your own trumpet, because no one else will.’ Other kinder people will shake their heads and say: ‘I suppose you have to take comfort where you can.’ Basque speakers themselves, who, in large part, continue to embrace the commonplace delusions of the imperialist theory, will sigh: ‘Personally, I’m not convinced, but then there’s no harm in wishing.’

They are all wrong. They may have given the matter some thought, but not enough. I repeat, then, before concluding my idea: No one is happier than a tragelaph who has a minority language as one of his two languages. Put more plain-



BERNARDO ATXAGA

Gorka Salmerón

ly: no writer is in a better position to reap such rare advantages.

Let me explain, and I will do so with a quote from Franz Kafka. As a keen fan of Yiddish theatre, and as a friend and neighbour of writers writing in both Yiddish and Czech, Kafka set down in his diary – on the 25th or 26th of December 1911 – a most illuminating thought, stating that literatures in minority languages can be extremely powerful, because anything written in such a language immediately acquires a political value. In other words, the very fact of writing in Yiddish or in Czech in Prague was in itself of social significance, and thus took on a deeper resonance.

We know now that the intrinsically political value of a language can also act against it and, to cite but one tragic example, Yiddish almost disappeared following the massacre of Yiddish speakers perpetrated by Hitler’s Fascists, which meant, as I seem to recall Isaac Bashevis Singer saying in his Nobel speech, that its literature would have to wait until Judgement Day in order to regain the many readers it once had; neverthe-

less, Franz Kafka’s statement continues to make sense in places like the present-day Basque Country, where, after the repression to which it was subjected during the Francoist dictatorship, there is, as a reaction against that and for other reasons too, tremendous support for the language among the Basque people.

A minority language guarantees the writer a place in the world, a social presence, which is already a plus. However, if the writer also becomes a true tragelaph, making translations or versions of his own work in his second language and getting them published, even better, because his books will thus enjoy a second life, an opportunity to reach larger literary spaces. The only negative consequence will be lack of time: he will need more hours and more days to publish as much as monolingual writers do; he will not, like them, be able to finish a novel and then blithely go out to dinner with friends to celebrate; he will have to remain chained to his galley bench and immediately start work shaping his second text. This is no small thing, and people who have dealings with tragelaphs will doubtless have heard them droning on about how time is precious, as well as complaining that, just as happened last year, they still haven’t had time for a holiday.



Where we are writing from

The writers who use Basque as our tool have often seen ourselves as small and unique, we have frequently felt the pride of being so, as if being small and unique was an advantage. Being small and unique has no merit, since you are small and unique per se. It is not a demerit either. A culture or language is not less valuable just because it is small and unique.

A Catalan writer once told me that we, Basque people, are so lucky, as we could read all the literature that has been written in Basque in a few years. That is how scarce it is. I couldn't see anything fortunate about being so orphaned regarding literary tradition. It is true that the history of Basque literature is short and sparse, and it could even be said that two generations of writers have never overlapped, due to the fact that literary production has been constantly interrupted by grave political events.

Currently, for the first time in the history of Basque literature, four generations are writing simultaneously, as those who started writing in 1970s are still active and keep creating their own path, whereas the new generations have had to *kill their fathers* to be able to grow literarily.

In this small Country where we all know each other, the writer knows well who their readers are. They have this very specific profile in mind every time they write a line. They use historic and cultural references on purpose and metaliterature is usually present in the text, since being part of the same cultural universe gives them the opportunity to express a lot in a few words. However, when our work is translated from Basque into other languages, the reader's profile is unknowable. It is impossible to know if they'll be able to understand the cultural references or not. In any case, we should not worry about losing cultural connotations in literary translation: if it's a good story, it'll find its way to the reader, with a richer or blunter style.

What it is indeed very worrying is when writers decide to deliberately make their texts blunter because they



LAURA MINTEGI

Dani Blanco

know that their texts will immediately be translated into other languages. There was a time when writers used to have ideologised debates: what's more important, **what** we write or **how** we write it? Nowadays the main concern of some writers is what and how to write in order to see **how far** they can get. Who will read my translated literature?

First, this kind of writer feels the temptation to approach the hypothetical reader. They will use wider codes, employ a simpler style and a shared *topos* that is recognisable to all. They will attempt to create a visual story through a very graphic style, stories and descriptions that are easily understandable for foreign readers. The consequences of that practice are, however, evident. Simpler words are chosen to the detriment of polysemic words. Each word will be given only one meaning and always be same. Intercultural references will be employed, as well as common structures and connotative language. "Local topics" will be discarded, thereby benefiting "international" topics, and the author will immerse us in the *topos* that was sown by the culture of colonialism. And all this effort, for what? If the aim is to increase the number of readers, all the effort could very possibly be in vain.

The "international reader" does not exist, neither do the abstract subjects that are presented to us through the percentages of the statistics. Average profiles are not representative of any place. The reader is not a unit that can be formed taking a half from here and another half from there but a whole person that belongs to a very specific when and where and that person wants to read something identifiable that has a colour of somewhere and the smell of sometime. It could be a story that is situated in the reader's space and time, or not, but it will be situated somewhere at some time, it will include style, accent, expressiveness, emotion...

Even if we don't know **how far** the texts that we create will travel, we need to know **where** we are writing **from**, when and where we created our literary world. Big truth can be found in small things. Miss Marple showed us that all the possible reactions and feeling in the world, on a small scale, were reflected in her neighbours.



The greatness of the small

It is believed that the writers that use languages that are not widespread and come from countries that don't appear on maps are invisible. That idea is partly true, even inside the limited area of the Basque Country, where the writers from the northern part (Iparalde) are automatically pushed to the shadow as by compared with the flood of creatives and the strong culture of the southern part (Hegoalde) we are too weak

in numbers to bring our work to light. Therefore, it shouldn't be hard to imagine what our reality is in Europe or on a global scale. Nobody sees us at first glance... but from time to time we are invited to show our work around the world. And luckily, apart from Basque, we also speak a couple of other languages: we are able to communicate with writers that don't speak Basque in most of the places.

Apart from the prominent writers from the southern part, us who come from the northern Basque Country also receive invitations to read our poetry around Europe, take part in panel discussions or take part in writer-in-residence programmes in countries such as Germany or Italy from time to time. To be honest, we are not professional writers, so in order to earn (or lose?) a living we work on everyday jobs, jobs that are not necessarily linked to literature, journalism or teaching. So as to go somewhere after having said yes to an invitation, we act as circus contortionists to make our working hours fit, we negotiate with our bosses, talk to our colleagues: it is not easy. We all know how diluted the structures among workers have become, making it difficult to get away from work.

I have been a proletarian writer-worker for many years. In many cases, in order to get away by way of literature, I have made use of my precious holidays, to the point of finding myself without any days off, especially when I was the president of Seaska (Seaska is the federation of Ikastolas, schools in which pupils are taught either entirely or predominantly in the Basque language, in northern Basque Country)! However, I have always tried to answer in the affirmative to the offers that I have received and, that way, I have had the opportunity to visit various places in Europe and America; I have spun relationships with writers of those lands, tasted atmospheres of every kind, and recycled what I had witnessed and learned in my literary production as many of my poems and texts in my collections have the shape of travel logs or testimony. Those literary journeys have constituted a tool to decentre myself and grow apart from the white European perspective, particularly the one in 2007 in which I spent 3 weeks in Mexico for the occasion of the Month of the Francophonie after having received an invitation from the French Embassy's cultural services. I must admit that I returned from there



ITXARO BORDA

completely transformed, even though I feel that, ideologically, a Basque writer doesn't belong to events that are organised to honour the francophonie. Travelling abroad also helps us see that we are imprisoned by our own contradictions.

Finally, I would like to underline one last fact. Basque writers, northern and southern united for once, often complain about our precarious working conditions, and

with good reason. However, when we talk to writers from other countries in trips, conferences and outings we realise that extremely

harsh and grave situations can be found throughout this world and that writing is not a sinecure. Here in the Basque Country, we do have structures that, in spite of not being perfect, serve to hold our literature, function satisfactorily and give us the chance to lead a life in the style of a writer. We should bear in mind that there are some languages that have even less political protection than ours, especially in Central and South America. However, that harsh environment does not stop writers from producing literature with positivity. Becoming aware of that reality entailed a very big change in my life. So big was the change that now, here in the Basque Country, some people even think that I am not conscious of the diglossic situation in which we live!

Even though I am not the Basque writer that has the greatest experience abroad, I have visited various places, and I feel that I have a net of literary and cultural relationships in my nut, so when an event (not always fortunate) occurs in some part of the world, I very often think "I know this person in Iraq" or in Syria, in Ghana or Mali, Brussels or Pontevedra. Once I went to a PEN congress that was held in Reykjavik and I came back wrapped in a touching spider web consisting of different writers and languages from all around the world. With those writers that I met on the aforementioned occasions, the steps of our relationships are threaded by messages and letters, I never forget them as they all bring something to my literary creation; above all, they bring the feeling of decentralisation that I mentioned before.

Let's bear something in mind: smallness, working in the shade or lack of visibility do not stop writers from writing or being writers, quite the opposite, and the reason that happens is that you know there is a friend ready to converse and live adventures with you, a counterpart who is still a stranger but comes from a small culture or language like you and will stand up to walk with us! Away from home, the diversity of the world is always ready to show us the way through transformational experiences.



Writing for Form

My daughter loves History. Ancient Egypt. And she also loves Playmobil. So I gifted her a Playmobil for her birthday. But then I realized that all the figures were men. The pharaoh, the soldier, the thief, even the skeleton and mummy. How was my daughter supposed to play? She needed a female figure. I searched the catalog and found a Cleopatra. I paid another 20 euros. Problem solved.

One often pays more when one belongs to a minority or excluded community. This is frequently the case with blacks, gay and lesbians, and vegetarians: you have to work, wait, or pay more. I myself am from a minority, the Basque. When Dictator Franco was in power, the Basque name, Kirmen, was forbidden. But my mother registered me under this name anyway. To Franco, it was the language of poor people with no culture—a useless language, and worse, the language spoken by those on the losing side in the Spanish Civil War.

In these 40 years since Dictator Franco's death, however, considerable work has been invested in Basque to transform it into a language suitable for culture, science, and communication. The number of Basque language-speakers is rising, as is its presence in society. Moreover, it's grown so much that a Basque writer has even been sent to Iowa!

Minorities often experience tensions with majority communities, but minorities also experience their own inner conflicts. Living in a minority can also be a kind of prison. The collective good overrides the individual's. As a child in the Basque Country of the 80's, I remember communal violence everywhere. There was one word in particular that bothered me: "zuek" (you, in plural). It was used all the time in arguments.

There was so much, "you, no you!"-ing thrown back and forth that I wondered who 'you' even referred to: the B (Basques), or maybe LB (Leftist Basques), or the LBWAAV (leftist Basques who are against violence), or LBN-WAAVWRB (leftist Basques who are against violence and who read books), or why not LBNWAAVWRBLJU (leftist



KIRMEN URIBE

I found my answer in "Basque Country" (Euskal Herria), which literally means a group of people speaking in Basque. Euskal Herria is not a place, but rather a group of people linked by language. Basque (Euskaldun), therefore, refers to anyone that can speak Basque, or anyone who wants to learn it, regardless of genetics, passports, or borders. In this way, both my Japanese translator and my mother are both Basque! Currently, Basque society hosts many migrants. Nowadays, migrants and their children comprise the majority of Basque speakers, not only its inheritors from three or four generations back. This is a step forward.

Languages are like living things. As such, they are equal—we should respect and preserve them. Recently, I heard a famous writer in Dublin say that Swahili is a minor language compared to English. Outrageous. Similarly, 40 years ago, the Spanish president said physics can't be taught in Basque. Today, in 2019, a Basque physicist is a candidate for the Nobel Prize.

If you belong to a minority, it means hard work. In the context of literature, this means fighting the clichés and prejudices others have about what you are supposed to write. The task of the writer is not to tell about the exotic particularities of a place, but rather, to write "from" an individual's distinct place in a community and the world. Joyce and Beckett were Irish, but we don't expect them to write about sheep. They wrote from the margin, which freed them to write in new forms. Free from social restraints, let's write without fears or ties, like a girl playing with a Playmobil pyramid.

You know, my daughter did not like Cleopatra. She preferred the thief, who to her imaginative eyes, was female.

Basque nationalist who are against violence and who read books and like Joyce's Ulysses)— really just me. I was shocked that they identified me in a group, rather than seeing me as an individual person.

How can you be loyal and critical to your community at the same time? That's the question. How can you build a society that respects an endangered culture, and weaker language, while also respecting the multiple identities that live there?



The act of writing in Basque

Writing literature in Basque is, firstly, the consequence of a decision made before even starting to write. People who speak minority languages are obliged to be bilingual. Us, Basque speakers, speak either Basque and Spanish or Basque and French. Therefore, there is already something distinctive in that first step as, first of all, we need to decide in what language we will write. That is a first decision that writers of other languages do not even consider. That decision is made before a single word is written on the paper, and it is neither coincidental nor incidental, on the contrary, it is a decision that has several connotations.

We have, therefore, chosen to write in a language that is not normalised, that is in the process of becoming normalised (it is as official as Spanish in the Basque Autonomous Community, however, 37% of the population understand it and 20% speak it). In our own country, in our city, our neighbourhood many people don't understand what we write. In fact, often we are unknown in our own communities.

On the other hand, even though we write in a language that is thousands and thousands of years old, it is paradoxically going through a sort of adolescence, as it was not until the late 1960s that standard Basque (euskara batua) was developed. We are writing in a language that is simultaneously old and young, which results in a scarcity of references but also in great freedom. The writers in my generation are the first to have completed all our studies in Basque, and from that point of view, we have an advantage that previous generations didn't have. However, as we write, we acknowledge that the future of our language is not certain.



KARMELE JAIÓ

Since we are bilingual writers, many of us also translate our own works. Thus, those books, more than a translation, become a rewritten version of the original work, an adaptation. In comparison with those who translate their own literature, the translators who translate other authors are usually more loyal to the original text.

Another characteristic of Basque translations is that a "bridge-language" is often needed in the process. That is to say, many translations that have been made from

Basque into other languages have employed another version, generally the Spanish one, that has worked as a bridge between the source language and the target language.

Although we write in a minority language, we address universal topics. The only way in which literature can approach a universal topic is starting from something specific and familiar. In this case, from our small language and small world.

In Bernardo Atxaga's words, the work of the writer can be compared with a small mouse who wants to enter a big room. The mouse manages to enter big halls without opening huge heavy doors. It gets in through a small hole, a crack in the wall. In the same way, the writer aims to talk about what is universal through a specific story, an idea that has been dreamed up in their mind. That is how the author writes about love, death and the passing of time: through a small hole that shows us the life, thoughts, certainties and contradictions of a person.

Atxaga's metaphor is also useful to make the situation of the writers who use minority languages as their tool visible. Through minority languages we write texts that are addressed to a universal reader. Our writing is open to the world. Our writings are about the world, but starting from what is specific, familiar. From our language.



Impossible symmetries

What is the relationship between the culture created in Basque and that created in Spanish in the Basque Country like? There is a politically correct answer which, despite not being a lie, is not very interesting: that this relationship is becoming better and better. The old automatism that ideologises the language, the weight of former prejudice is blurring. The time of blocs is gone, hooray for the cracks, since flowers grow in cracks. But microprejudice persists, subtle and concealed, untouchable. We have become accustomed to judging each other by mere appearance for too long, and that bad habit will not disappear overnight. To be honest, there is a trick in that first question, as it is presupposed that those who work and live in Basque are a closed and defined group. And that's not the case. Because all Basque creatives are *erdaldun* (Basque word that is used to describe a person who speaks a language that is not Basque; generally Spanish or French), and we often speak Spanish, whether in situations that are related to work or not. Because our basqueness is intermittent. Because almost all of us are, above all and in our everyday praxis, *erdaldun*. And then, some of us, are also *euskaldun* (Basque speakers), in some places, for some of the time. Therefore, Basque culture lovers are continuously moving boundary stones, the lights and shadows of self(translation) are their daily bread. Apart from doing their job, they see themselves in a position where they're required to represent their environment, to be some sort of proselytiser or preacher. «So, what's up in your little world?», we are asked sometimes. To the ridiculously long list of tasks that a Basque creative already has, that of the special correspondent needs to be added; we talk to people about our own culture in our homeland as if we were tourists travelling around Albania. Looking at it optimistically, we could say that our effort is our capital; being part of groups that have different scales and using different languages makes us richer. We are in charge of the marketing of our little world, accidental promoters, counsels for the defence. The fury that the lack of visibility generates in us is to be blamed for that, surely. Those who take in the last news about Beyonce, Rosalía or Pérez Reverte through osmosis, hardly notice that there are people creating culture around them as they understand that the immovable Basque circle is endogamous and the thing that we create is not for them. Or rather, is not appreciable.

It is arduous to earn a living from a vocation like ours, and that in itself should create some sort of «class conscience» among us, a solidarity between professionals of the same trade, regardless of the language that we create in. And so it is. Language, in fact, is not determining, as when it comes to achieve mutual understanding, aesthetic affinity might turn out to be more important. But that is not completely true: the eyes of those who write in Spanish are, understandably, more attentive to the tendencies, literature supplements and controversies that come from Spain, while as for me, the issues that stimulate them leave me completely indifferent. Those who create in Spanish seek to plunge into the Spanish market, and, killing two birds with one stone, they also try to plunge me into that market. I feel as if I were an Albanian writer in those cases. I feel as foreigner in my own land. Whe-



HARKAITZ CANO

reas they? They are content with receiving distant scarce news from the world that functions in Basque. «Give us some headlines, please». As if they meant: «It is a wide world; even curiosity has its limits». And they are absolutely right in that point; according to statistics, Basque speakers don't usually get any Shakespeare in the Christmas lottery.

Basque musicians, film-makers, actors... are valued both here and abroad. Everything goes smoothly as long as Basque remains in a level of a kitsch characteristic that could be labelled as local colour. What Amets Arzallus stated not long ago is undeniable: we all support Basque language, as long as we don't give it a central role. Since, when it comes to feeling proud of a culture, it feels much easier to feel proud of a culture that has no language. Here, we have seen two clear examples of that in the last decades: cooking and sculpture. It is not a coincidence that those two fields are the ones that have been chosen to, pardon my obscurity, sell our country abroad. What is more, we could say that what sculpture represented in the past is now represented by cooking, as if Zygmunt Bauman's liquid modernity, which is so

often mentioned these days, had liquidated Chillida and Oteiza, transformed them in some materic way, since gastronomy is sold as ephemeral sculpture. Nevertheless, when we talk about «a culture without a language», we are yet again employing a trick, as those chefs and sculptors have, in almost all cases, become stars through Spanish.

We have been fooled to appreciate the symmetry of bilingualism, but the weight of that symmetry is carried by one side only: «Can you repeat in Spanish what you've just said in Basque?» they say with the best intentions, serving «everyone's understanding» as an excuse. And we take the bait, in spite of the fact that we are presenting a book written in Basque. We are constantly asked for the translation of the original, for the partition of our hard disk. Excuse me, but that it not symmetry but subordination.

Some years ago, a writer claimed his right «not to be able to speak Basque». A certainly peculiar claim. What if we apply the aforementioned symmetry in this case? What level of criticism would face a Basque writer if they dared to claim «their right not to be able to speak Spanish»?

Some might say that's a characteristic of these times, that it's a free choice, that is part of globalisation, that we ought to embrace multiculturalism. Ivan de la Nuez, however, criticises both models in his very appealing essay «Teoría de la retaguardia»: multiculturalism would be the way to put «each beast in its cage», while globalisation could be described as the way to introduce «all the beasts in the same cage, provided that those beasts are sufficiently tamed». What cage do we want our world to be in? Is a choice between caged a free choice? I have used geometry to explain our situation, but perhaps zoology would be more helpful to define some aspects, since languages also fight for physical and symbolic space. Basque, in particular, for survival.