

LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN AND VIOLENCE IN A MINORITY  
LITERATURE: THE CASE OF BASQUE LITERATURE

*Mari Jose Olaziregi*

University of the Basque Country-Spain

mj.olaziregi@ehu.es

**Resumen**

Este artículo pretende reflexionar sobre la presencia de la violencia política y, en concreto, del terrorismo de E.T.A. en la literatura infantil y juvenil escrita en lengua vasca. Para ello, se parte de una somera presentación del sistema literario vasco actual y de los factores socio-históricos que han condicionado el devenir de la literatura vasca.

Tras perfilar muy brevemente las tendencias y estilos que prevalecen en la actualidad, la autora analiza algunos textos que directa o indirectamente tratan el tema de la violencia política. La preeminencia de un realismo subjetivo, el interés por mostrar el sufrimiento que el conflicto político genera entre la población vasca, los mensajes que abogan por un entendimiento y una solución pacífica...son, entre otras, algunas de las conclusiones que se subrayan.

**Palabras clave:** literatura infantil y juvenil vasca, crítica literaria, literatura infantil y juvenil, ideología.

**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the presence of various forms of violence and situations of conflict in contemporary Basque literature. We focus specifically on the limited prominence that the Basque political conflict and the terrorism of ETA have in the works of contemporary Basque authors. For this purpose, we start

with a brief introduction to the characteristics of children's literature written in Basque and to the evolution of its literary system. Questions having to do with the ethical function of literature in a politically violent environment, and with the narrative strategies used to express them serve to introduce a number of narrative works which have dealt with this topic in the last decade of the last century and the first decade of the present century.

**Key words:** Basque literature, literature for children and young adults, ideology and child.



#### Literature for children and young adults written in Basque. A brief introduction

Any introduction to literature written in the Basque language begins for the most part with a discussion of statistics concerning the language and the country which are its base. This is doubtless a necessary presentation for a literature that is largely unknown and written in a minority language. This is the purpose of the following lines: to introduce very briefly the historical, sociological and literary features which have shaped literature written in Basque.

For example, *The Basque History of the World*, written by journalist Mark Kurlansky (2001), offers details of interest for any Anglo-Saxon reader. As the author says, we speak Basque, the oldest Western European language, a language with only 700,000 speakers in all; our country measures only 8,218 square miles, a plot of land a little smaller than New Hampshire; this territory is divided between Spain and France but as Kurlansky states, "Basqueland looks too green to be Spain and too rugged to be France" (p. 18). Additionally, a number of instances in which the adjective "euskal" is featured are specifically mentioned, as are the fame of our cuisine (the preparation and conservation of codfish, for example); our well-known sport, jai alai (Basque handball); our most famous religious figure, Saint Ignatius of Loyola; our excellent contemporary Basque sculptors Jorge Oteiza and Eduardo Chillida; and the Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao.

Basque is an ancient language of pre-Indo-European origin. Basque (Euskara) gives its name and its nature to our country, Euskal Herria, the land of Euskara speakers, and for that reason we have tried, despite a history of prohibitions against using the language and despite its problems, to hold tight to our language through the

centuries. In the final analysis, as Steiner (2004) reminds us, when a language dies, a way of understanding the world dies with it, a way of looking at the world. One way of holding onto our language and expanding it beyond our borders is to win new readers through translation. However, borders, though a spur to literary creativity in the opinion of Claudio Magris, are a heavy burden for Basques. Few of our writers have managed to put us on the map in foreign countries and, though nowadays Basque reaches 87 million homes in Europe and 3 million families in the United States through radio and television, no such contact has been achieved with Basque books. One of our contemporary writers, Harkaitz Cano, paraphrasing W.C. Auden's *Letters from Iceland*, compares the situation of our literature to the solitude of an island, an old European island, often visited by well-known authors thanks to translation – it is a pleasure to be able to read Stevenson, Carroll, Saint-Exupéry, Nöstingler, Rodari, Lindgren... in Basque – but from whose shores few excursions to foreign territory have been made.

With respect to children's literature in Basque, according to the data given by López Gaseni (2000), 73.6% of Basque literature published between 1975 and 1995 consisted of translations. Although in 1975 translations to Basque of literature for children and young people began to increase in both quantity and quality, it was not until the 1990s that these translations were carried out with professionalism inasmuch as they then began to be made directly from the original language without using a bridge language, such as Spanish. In any case, the extremely limited number of translations in the other direction, that is, from Basque to other languages, is striking. In the 1980s, only 9 works by 4 different authors were translated, while in the 1990s, 58 works by 15 authors were translated (López Gaseni & Etxaniz, 2005; p. 114). It must also be noted that three-fourths of the translations made from Basque to other languages in the 1990s were made to other official languages of the Spanish state (Spanish, Catalan and Galician), and that the remaining 25% were made to other minority languages such as Asturian, Albanian, Frisian and Breton. The Basque authors Mariasun Landa (Olaziregi, 2003) and Bernardo Atxaga (Olaziregi, 2005) are the only ones who have truly achieved any significant international status.

We could say that the socio-historical situation of Basque is due to the rather late evolution of our literature. From 1545, when the first Basque book was published (Bernard Etxepare's *Linguae vasconum primitiae*), to 1879, only some 100 books were published in Basque. These numbers began to rise at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> cen-

tury, when Basque literature began to gain strength; only then, in Bernardo Atxaga's metaphor, did the hedgehog begin to wake from its hibernation.<sup>1</sup> It is precisely one of these, *Ipuin onak* [*Moral Stories*] by Bizenta Mogel (1804), which can be considered the first text of literature for children and young people. It was also the first literary publication by a woman in a tradition dominated by men. Although the text may show a didactic and moralist purpose, we must stress the importance of the book as an exponent of a new type of narration, and at the same time as an exponent of a new type of reading material that was more literary but still somewhat removed from strictly aesthetic objectives. *Moral Stories* is really a translation and adaptation of Aesop's fables, and it served as a point of departure for the appearance of a whole series of fabulists, although in most cases, verse was to be the predominant form. Bizenta

<sup>1</sup> I write in a strange language. Its verbs,  
the structure of its relative clauses,  
the words it uses to designate ancient things  
- rivers, plants, birds -  
have no sisters anywhere on Earth.  
A house is *etxe*, a bee *erle*, death *heriotz*.  
The sun of the long winters we call *eguzki* or *eki*;  
the sun of the sweet, rainy springs is also  
- as you'd expect - called *eguzki* or *eki*.  
(it's a strange language, but not that strange).

Born, they say, in the megalithic age,  
it survived, this stubborn language, by withdrawing,  
by hiding away like a hedgehog in a place,  
which, thanks to the traces it left behind there,  
the world named the Basque Country or *Euskal Herria*.  
Yet its isolation could never have been absolute  
- cat is *katu*, pipe is *pipa*, logic is *lojika* -  
rather, as the prince of detectives would have said,  
the hedgehog, my dear Watson, crept out of its hiding place  
(to visit, above all, Rome and all its progeny).

The language of a tiny nation, so small  
you cannot even find it on the map,  
it never strolled in the gardens of the Court  
or past the marble statues of government buildings;  
in four centuries it produced only a hundred books...  
the first in 1545; the most important in 1643;  
the Calvinist New Testament in 1571;  
the complete Catholic Bible around 1860.  
Its sleep was long, its bibliography brief  
(but in the twentieth century, the hedgehog awoke).

BERNARDO ATXAGA  
(in Atxaga, B., *Obabakoak*, Hutchinson, London, 1992)

Mogel's case is particularly exceptional since it is estimated that only 15% of women of her time were able to read and write. In her case, she fulfilled the conditions that Virginia Woolf attributes to female authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: a late marriage and no children.

The preeminence of the nationalist ideology caused the literary production of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be shaped again by extraliterary forces. The genre of theater was, without a doubt, the most popular of the time, comprising nearly 50% of literary publication. It is in this context that the first work of theater for children, *Nekane edo neskutzaaren babesia* [*Nekane or the Protection of the Virgin*] (1922), was written by another woman, Tene Mujika.

The emergence of Basque schools in the 1920s and 1930s stimulated Basque literacy and created a demand for reading material for younger people. Works with a clear didactic and moral purpose, collections of traditional stories, a number of translations (Grimm, Wilde, Schmid...) and books of stories about local customs written for adults but taken up also by the young readers of the time comprised the list of available reading material. As in the case of other peninsular literatures, the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) brought devastating effects to Basque literary production. Not only were there significant numbers of losses and exiles (150,000 people), but the winning side also added a repressive policy. This is an era in which Basque names were prohibited, and even inscriptions in Basque on tombstones in cemeteries were not allowed, an era in which the policies of Franco brought their censorship to the streets, to the administration and to the culture. Thus, the postwar generation was one of the most important in Basque literature, since it received what was most needed at the time: continuity.

The modernization and stabilization of Basque literature for children and young adults began in the 1960s (due in part to the influence of Marijane Minaberri's books and the many translations that were published in those years). However, it was not until the 1980s that literature for children and young people written in Basque truly started to become established. If there is any critical event in the history of Basque literature, it is the death of the dictator Franco in 1975. Only then did Basque literature begin to establish the conditions necessary for its development (the bilingual decree, which expanded the corpus of potential readers, official funding for publishers and distributors, funding to protect production in Basque...). With a better estab-



lished and more extensive network of publishing houses, the number of books published in Basque gradually rose from an average of 31.5 books per year from 1876 to 1975, to an average of 659.2 books per year from 1976 to 1994. With respect to literature for children and young people, the percentages it has held out of the total production are remarkable. Between 1876 and 1935 only 2.4% of Basque publication was children's literature, however, this percentage rose to 9.8% between 1936 and 1975, and to 23.1% between 1976 and 1994. At present, 20-25% of all works published in Basque are literature for children and young adults. Every year 60 to 70 new works of literature for children and young people are published in Basque, and if we look at the statistics from 2002, we see that a total of 1,586 books were published in Basque, of which 344 were literature for children and young people. The average print run is generally 1,500 to 2,000 copies. Additionally, it was in the 1980s when literary prizes for literature for children and young adults were first created, serving as a springboard for writers. These include the Lizardi Prize (1982-), the Baporea-SM Prize (1985-) and the Bilintx Prize (1986-), to which were added in the 1990s the Basque Country Prize for Literature for Children and Young Adults (1997-) and the Antonio María Labaien Prize (1993-). The 1980s saw a great demand for literature for children and young people due to increasing numbers of readers in educational centers and Basque language academies. It is for this reason that, over the years, the Basque books which have gone into multiple editions have primarily been literature for children and young people.

New and challenging literary styles started to emerge during the 1980s as young writers strove to renew the genre. For instance, Mariasun Landa wrote the critical-realist text *Chan fantasma* in 1984 (published in English as *Karmentxu and the Little Ghost*, University of Nevada Press, 1996; translated by Linda White), Bernardo Atxaga and Anjel Lertxundi wrote fantastic tales such as *Chuck Aranberri dentista baten etxean* [*Chuck Aranberri at the Dentist's*] (1980) and *La máquina de la felicidad* [*The Happiness Machine*] (1988), and Bernardo Atxaga wrote avant-garde plays such as *Logalea zeukan trapezistaren kasua* [*The Case of the Sleepy Trapeze Artist*] (1984). The protagonists of this literary renewal were authors and illustrators who during the 1980s joined in creating literature for children and young adults, a tiny artistic enterprise at the time.

The adjective that best defines the current literary state of Basque literature for children and young people is "eclectic". As in the case of Basque literature for

adults, the textual poetics, trends and typologies are highly varied in this field of Basque literature, so much so that trying to use generic typologies to describe the careers of some of the most relevant authors would be problematic. One example of this is Mariasun Landa's constant renewal of her own writing. She has moved from the critical realism of *Karmentxu and the Little Ghost*, through the minimalism of *Iholdi* [*Iholdi*] (1992) and the nonsensical humour of *Galtzerdi suizida* [*The Suicidal Sock*] (2001), to the absurdist style of *Kokodriloa ohe azpian* [*A Crocodile Under the Bed*] (2003).

It would be equally difficult to describe the career of Bernardo Atxaga. One of his greatest successes was with fantastic-realist novella *Behi euskaldun baten memoriak* [*Memoirs of a Basque Cow*] (1991), but he has employed many other literary styles. For example, the *Bambulo* series comprises works of historiographic metafiction, and *Groenlandiako lezioa* [*The Greenland Lecture*] is an experiment in genre hybridization. Other canonical contemporary Basque authors are also writing in this vein, for example, Juan Kruz Igerabide, whose poems and stories have found a readership both inside and outside the Basque Country. His titles include *Begi niniaren poemak* [*Poems from the Pupil of the Eye*] (1992); *Botoi bat bezala/Como un botón* [*Like a Button*] (bilingual edition, 1999); *Hosto gorri, hosto berde/Hoja roja, hoja verde* [*Red Leaf, Green Leaf*] (bilingual edition, 2002) and *Jonas eta hozkailu beldurtia* [*Jonas and the Frightened Fridge*] (1998). Patxi Zubizarreta is another interesting author who has shown the ability to write gripping adventure novels for young people (e.g. *Eztia eta ozpina* [*Honey and Vinegar*] (1994), and *Gizon izandako mutila* [*The Boy Who Was a Man*] (1998)) as well as short stories of great poetic intensity such as *Usoa, hegan etorritako neskatua* [*Usoa, the Girl Who Flew to Us*] (1999). There is also the better-known Anjel Lertxundi, whose work bears the mark of realist fantasy, oral literature and metafiction, and whose novels for young adults include *Lehorreko koadernoia* [*The Land Journal*] (2001) and *Lurak berdinuko nau* [*The Earth Will Have Me*] (1990).

These are only a few of the 50 writers and 25 illustrators who populate the present Basque literary system. Nevertheless, only a very small number of writers, about 7, are able to make a living from their literature and from activities related to their creative work such as giving classes, conferences and workshops, or by contributing to the press. On the other hand, although Basque literary institutions, and the university in particular, incorporated the teaching of literature for children and young people in the 1990s, thereby legitimizing this type of literature, the same cannot be said about

the place of Basque literature in the literary sphere of the Spanish state. Statistics such as the fact that only 3 Basque authors, Bernardo Atxaga, Juan Kruz Igerabide and Mariasun Landa, have been included in the canon of 100 works of literature for children (see *El País*, 5 April, 2003), or that only one Basque author has ever won the National Prize for Literature for Children and Young Adults (Mariasun Landa, in 2003, for *A Crocodile Under the Bed*) are cases in point. However, these reflections would be incomplete if we failed to take into account the recognition that Basque literature for children and young people in general, and some of its authors in particular, have had in the last few years. Recent prizes to Basque authors include the April-2003 Prize to Joanes Urkixo, the Leer es Vivir [Reading is Life]-2003 Prize to Felipe Juaristi, and the Lazarillo-2002 Prize to Laida Martínez.

#### *Violence and contemporary literature for children and young adults in Basque*

The so-called Basque problem and, specifically, the problem of the terrorism of ETA, have undoubtedly been our greatest problem in the last few decades. As Kurlansky's book reminds us, terrorism has been the topic of fully 85% of articles published in the United States on Basque issues.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, since ETA<sup>3</sup> declared its

<sup>2</sup> Iñaki Zabaleta, lecturer of the Faculty of Journalism at the University of the Basque Country, writes in his article "The Basques in the International Press: Coverage by the New York Times (1950-1996)" (in Douglass et al. (eds.), 1999, pp. 68-93):

"The Basques, as a nation without a state and as a marginal society, have little capacity to produce internationally newsworthy events. Their rather inconsequential economic and social weight, even within Spain, makes them of scant interest to the international audience. Nor are standard Basque politics, whether regarding a degree of parliamentary self-government within a federal Spain or as highly circumscribed regional players in Spanish and European affairs, worthy of much outside attention. As a consequence, negative news, mostly related to terrorism, will continue to dominate Basque coverage within the international news flow, at least until such time that peace is attained." (p. 88)

<sup>3</sup> The third part of Kurlansky's book briefly explores the evolution of ETA (ETA: "Euskadi ta Askatasuna", which means "Basque Country and Freedom"). Since the start of its terrorist activities in the 1960s, ETA has assassinated nearly 900 people (80% of these victims have been killed since the establishment of democracy in 1975 to the present date). The latest Basque government campaign to help victims of terrorism brought to light the fact that approximately 42,000 people have been living under threat from ETA in the last decades (including policemen, politicians from non-nationalist parties, university teachers and intellectuals). These are horrifying figures which, added to the following information, paint a pretty gruesome picture: there are 660 Basque political prisoners scattered around 4 countries. In 2002, Amnesty International denounced 320 cases of torture against them in Spanish jails and Amnesty's latest report, dated 2006, includes more accusations of torture. I would like

permanent cease-fire on March 22, 2006, Basques have been living in a time of optimism and hope,<sup>4</sup> hoping to see, at last, the possibility of solving this tragic problem which has brought so much suffering in recent decades. Although the future remains uncertain and we still ask ourselves "What's going to happen now?",<sup>5</sup> there is no doubt that we stand at a critical point in our modern history.

With respect to Basque literature, although for many years it has been accused of living on the bounty of Basque sociopolitical reality, it is certain that in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially beginning in 1990, we have seen an increasing number of works of fiction that take a literary look at this political reality that holds such importance for the Basques. Clearly, this is not some type of 19<sup>th</sup> century realism that attempts to "explain" or testify to a world that believes in progress and development; rather, it is a renewed realism. By appropriating the innovations of the contemporary novel and the characteristics of other art forms (especially cinema), literary realism has undergone several transformations in 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Basque fiction: we have had objectivist realism, critical realism, socialist realism, magic realism, dirty realism, etc. Although today's realist novels deal with their surrounding reality, most often they mimic it subjectively. The themes of the realist tradition resurface in the contemporary realist novel: identity crises, uprooting, historic events, etc. But, as mentioned above, another recurrent subject is the Basque terrorist group ETA. In the 1990s, the following books about ETA were published: Bernardo Atxaga's *The Lone Man* (1996, Harvill Press) and *The Lone Woman* (1999, Harvill

to appropriate the conclusions of Castells' article "Globalization, Identity, and the Basque Question" (in Douglass et al. (eds.), 1999, pp. 22-33), and his diagnosis that there is no easy solution to the problem of Basque terrorism. In his article, Castells points out that Basque terrorism surfaced as a result of Francoist repression, and that ETA was born as a reaction against the civil guard's abusive tactics.

<sup>4</sup> This optimism is reflected in the most recent Euskobarómetro ("Basque-barometer"), a sociological statistical survey carried out in the Spanish autonomous community of the Basque Country (*País Vasco*) by the University of the Basque Country: <http://www.ehu.es/cpvweb/paginas/euskobarometro.html>.

<sup>5</sup> "The story that began when a group of university students founded Basque Homeland and Liberty, the organization known as ETA, has finally come to an end with its announcement last week of a permanent cease-fire. If a satellite could detect surges of relief and happiness rather than clouds or storm systems, then the entire southwestern part of Europe would appear on every television screen, and the weatherman of the hour would describe "a sudden reduction in the force of gravity in the region of the Pyrenees," along with breezes and winds that can cure any melancholy. (...) "What's going to happen now?" (Atxaga, Bernardo. 2006. "The Basque Spring", *The New York Times*, 29 March, 2006).



Press), Mikel Hernández Abaitua's *Etorriko haiz nirekin?* [*Will You Come with Me?*] (1991) and *Obe bat ozeanoaren erdian* [*A Bed in the Middle of the Ocean*] (2001), Laura Mintegi's *Nerea eta biok* (1994) (published in English as *Nerea and I*, translated by Linda White, Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), Ramon Saizarbitoria's *Hamaika pauso* [*Innumerable Steps*] (1995), Xabier Mendiguren's *Berriro igo nauzu* [*We Went Up Again*] (1997), Pello Zabaleta's *Arian ari* [*In It*] (1996), Joxe Belmonte's *Hamar urte barru* [*In Ten Years' Time*] (2002), and Anjel Lertxundi's *Zorion perfektua* (2002) (*Perfect Happiness*, translated by Amaia Gabantxo, Center for Basque Studies, 2007). All of these writers employ subjective realism with a view to giving a voice to characters and situations that are rarely given space in the never-ending media bombardment about the "Basque troubles".<sup>6</sup>

And with respect to literature for children and young people in Basque, could we say that political violence and the topic of terrorism have become the preeminent literary topic of the last few decades? We believe not, at least not to the same extent to which it has been a dominant topic in Anglo-American culture (Reimer, 1997), nor to the same extent that the conflict appears in texts for young people in Northern Ireland (Benito de la Iglesia, 2005). Although it is certain that critical realism, modernized with themes that have recently appeared in our literature (family conflicts, immigration, senior citizens), is the prevalent typology of Basque literature for children and young people and the one that seems to be most attractive to the processes of canonization (López Gaseni & Etxaniz, 2005), the truth is that there is less political violence than we might think in works written for younger readers. Furthermore, if we examine the reading habits of modern young Basques, we see that among the most popular works, very few belong to this thematic trend. Specifically, I obtained remarkable results on surveys which I carried out for my doctoral thesis of 3,000 Basque people aged 14 to 18 about their reading habits, likes and dislikes (Olaziregi, 2000). For example, topping the list of the 10 favorite works of young Basques were *Obabakoak* and *Memoirs of a Basque Cow*, both by Bernardo Atxaga, followed by the best-sellers *The Pillars of the Earth* by Ken Follet and *The House of Spirits* by Isabel Allende. It is only in last place that we see a novel for adults, *Exkixu* [*Exkixu*] (1988), by Basque author Txillardegui, which tells the life story of a member of ETA. This novel, which at the time of writing is in its 8<sup>th</sup> edition, has joined the list of works for

<sup>6</sup> For a brief introduction to contemporary Basque literature, see the following websites: [http://www.transcript-review.org/issue.cfm?issue\\_id=20&lan=en](http://www.transcript-review.org/issue.cfm?issue_id=20&lan=en) (*Transcript* electronic journal), and [www.basqueliterature.com](http://www.basqueliterature.com) (Basque Literature Website).

adults also enjoyed by younger readers, a list which includes other titles that have been published in many more editions and that could be considered to be true best-sellers in Basque. We refer here to recent novels such as *Galdu arte* [*Until the End*] (1999) by Juan Luis Zabala, currently in its 16<sup>th</sup> edition, which tells the story of a group of squatters who are fans of punk music and its motto ("no future"). The survey shows that with age, although a taste for adventure and mystery novels remains prevalent, we see a clear tendency toward titles with greater sociopolitical content.

If we examine our recent literary production for young people, there is no doubt that, rather than texts that deal explicitly with the topic of Basque violence, works of fiction that stress a pacifist and conciliatory message predominate, or texts in which the Basque sociopolitical context appears as a backdrop or general stage for the events being narrated. Etxaniz (2005) gives a list of such works in his article, referring specifically to *Kandinskyren tradizioa/La tradición de Kandinsky* [*Kandinsky's Tradition*] (bilingual edition, Atenea, 2003) by the novelist from San Sebastián, Ramon Saizarbitoria, *Nire eskua zurean* [*My Hand in Yours*] (2004) by Mariasun Landa, and *Tunelaz bestaldean* [*On the Other Side of the Tunnel*] (2000) by Joxerra Garzia. In the first of these, *Kandinsky's Tradition*, it is mentioned that an artefact has exploded, and in *My Hand in Yours*, the ex-boyfriend of the mother of the protagonist had been involved in ETA. *On the Other Side of the Tunnel* tells the story of an adolescent whose mother is a prisoner in a distant jail for defending the town of "Duda" ["Doubt"] (a symbol for the Basque Country). Together with these, other notable titles make a clear argument in favor of pacifist attitudes and openness to dialogue, as in the narration *Marigorringoak hegan* [*Let it Rain, Let it Rain*] (1994) by Patxi Zubizarreta in which, symbolically, we are told that assassination is not the way to achieve objectives, no matter how legitimate they may be.

The career of our most international author, Bernardo Atxaga, deserves a special mention. He has published a series of texts during the last two decades that are a good example of the attraction that postmodern literary texts for younger readers have for the adult audience (cf. Thacker, 2002). Atxaga's tales of Shola the dog, *Shola y los leones* [*Shola and the Lions*] (SM, 1995) and *Shola y los jabalíes* [*Shola and the Wild Boars*] (SM, 1997) are deeply moving. Written in the past tense and with a third-person narrator, they have a lively narrative rhythm. One of Atxaga's textual strategies is to borrow from the oral tradition; another is the use of irony. In *Shola and the Lions*, Atxaga writes again about a theme that is a constant element of his work: the

rejection of heroism. Shola thinks she is a lion, and this notion lends humor to the story. Once again, we encounter some of the recurrent elements of Atxaga's fantastic fiction: mirrors that distort their objects and people who believe wholeheartedly in fictions. In *Shola and the Wild Boars*, Atxaga writes about dangerousness and the absurdity of some of the compromises we make in our lives. The suggestion that one should question compromise and the necessity that the considered desires of the individual should prevail are ideas that are underlined in *Shola and the Wild Boars*. In addition to these works, we must also remember another novel for young people written by Atxaga, *Memoirs of a Basque Cow*, translated to date into 10 languages and whose international reception was excellent. The protagonist is the cow Mo, who decides to write her memoirs and thus to record the early years of her life on a Basque farm where members of the resistance against Franco were hiding out. The importance of reflection, a reasonable attitude and openness to dialogue are values which are reiterated in this excellent novel by Atxaga (Olaziregi, 2005).

In any case, it was in the last decade of the past century when the topic of political violence was first dealt with explicitly in Basque works for young adults. The occurrence of this topic in the Branka (Proa) collection issued by the largest Basque publishing house, Elkar, deserves specific mention. The collection includes excellent translations of classic authors such as Stevenson, Doyle, London, Wilde and Gogol, as well as of more modern authors such as Nöstlinger and Härtling. *Ainboari gutunak* [*Letters to Ainhoa*] (1990) by Basque writer Joseba Sarrionandia was the first title in the collection. This is a fictional text in the form of a collection of letters which the narrator, who is a fugitive from justice, writes to a girl named Ainhoa, the daughter of the family that hid him during his flight from the police. The content of the letters is varied and includes, in addition to very short stories, observations on movies, books and classic characters... and also touches on the situation of the jails where there are Basque political prisoners. The narrator uses the term "war" to refer to the Basque conflict (p. 8) and mentions the Basque "children of war" who are born in prison (p. 43) and whose parents are classified as "fanatics and terrorists" (p. 36) by the Spanish government, and as "fertile and heroes" by the "revolutionaries" (p. 36). For the narrator, these prisoner parents have, above all, a "human dimension" (p. 36). There is no doubt that *Letters to Ainhoa* has special significance for the Basque reader, who would be familiar with the autobiographical background of the book; Joseba Sarrionandia is a member of ETA who has been a fugitive since 1985 when he escaped from the prison at Martutene in Guipúzcoa. In its 10<sup>th</sup> edition to date, this is a text

that has had a warm welcome from young Basques, although not as warm as that of Sarrionandia's other book of stories *Narrazioak* [*Narrations*] (1983), which has gone into more than 17 editions to date and which, far from any political content, includes stories which have been acclaimed and canonized by contemporary Basque literary criticism.

*Harri barruko bihotz borrokak* [*The Sentimental Struggles of Stones*] (1999) is a book of stories by the writer and journalist Juan Luis Zabala. It includes three intertwined stories in which the characters and situations are repeated, and whose socio-political context is the same: the Basque Country during ETA's cease-fire in 1998. The main characters of these stories know each other, they are almost neighbors. They learn of the detention of a group of young people that they know and of the following accusations of torture made by them. The portrait that Zabala paints in the book speaks of a generation of young Basques who, though near to the objectives of ETA, do not support its methods (p. 70) but do support their friends in the face of accusations of torture. One of the characters, a retired singer, admits to having sung in festivals supporting Basque prisoners and, although he does not support the methods of ETA, confesses to having felt obliged to support cultural events in its favor because they were organized by people in his town, people he knows and who are close to him. In any case, he states that he felt relief for having retired from Basque song (p. 21), since he sees this professional activity as being too closely related to politics. The protagonist of the following story is an amateur cyclist who admits to not having been previously involved in political activities but who feels obliged to become involved after claims of torture are made by his friends (p. 70). The protagonist and narrator of the last story is a prisoner who has been tortured. She says, constantly, that she feels like a stone, an anonymous stone on the side of the road. As we see, this book of stories incorporates stories whose strength and dramatic power, increased through the use of first-person narrative, portray a Basque youth "trapped" in the Basque political conflict.

The paratext of the last text that we are going to discuss, *Txakurraren alaba* [*The Dog's Daughter*] (2000), by writer Xabier Mendiguren Elizegi, is truly provocative. The Basque nationalist left has used the term "txakurra" (dog) to refer to the national police and the civil guard, police forces which are felt to be forces of occupation. The protagonist and narrator of the story is Teresa Márquez, an adolescent from Zaragoza who goes to San Sebastián to live after her father, an officer of the national

police, is transferred there. As in the novels and theatrical works by Mendiguren Elizegi, this work also shows the prevailing interest in and objective of portraying a conflictive political reality, although in this case it is not the point of view of a member of ETA or of citizens who support it which guides the narrative thread, but rather, that of “the other side” of the conflict. At the beginning of the story, Teresa admits to being afraid, and to feeling completely oppressed by the type of life she is condemned to live (she has to lie about her father’s profession in order to avoid problems (p. 7)), and does not hesitate to state that it would be preferable to live “in a concentration camp” (p. 7). As the narration of events unfolds, she comes to know her classmates, who participate in activities supporting the prisoners, she is witness to graffiti (p. 66) and demonstrations against the police... but also there arises in her the desire to become more closely and completely acquainted with this social and cultural environment, and to understand it; hence, she enrolls in Basque language classes and hides this fact from her parents. The vision of the sculpture “Besarkada” (Hug) by famous Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida (p. 34) inspires in her a very intense desire to try to understand, to familiarize herself with the causes of political confrontation in the Basque Country. The narrative climax of the text stems from the detention of some of Teresa’s friends and from the knowledge that her father is one of the police agents accused of torturing them. The confrontation with the paternal figure serves to confirm in her the desire to be integrated into Basque society and, at the same time, to allow her to admit that her own father is but another victim of the system (p. 186). The end of the story could not be more eloquent: Teresa manages to learn Basque and integrate herself into the Basque world, in order thus to claim an identity which is not shaped only by the fact of being the daughter of an officer of the national police and belonging to a different culture, but by the fact of being open to new nuances, new meanings, a many-hued Basque identity. It is notable that there is no questioning of armed conflict; only the suffering which both sides have experienced as a result of the conflict is underlined. Teresa defends her right to not be ostracized solely for being the daughter of a national policeman. Her words are quite eloquent:

I am still Teresa Márquez, without the need for any translation. I needed many years before I was able to write such a story in Basque (...). I was a combination of many things, and many more things were combined in me later, but I would never accept that my being should be limited to a single dimension, nor that I should be “the dog’s daughter” for anyone. (pp. 187-188)

As we have seen, the topic of Basque political violence has generated universes of fiction for young adults that have tried to portray and exorcize many of the demons that still, unfortunately, continue to live among us. It remains only for us to wish that we will know a near future in which this topic will be narrated in the past tense, in the farthest possible past.

#### Bibliographical references

- BENITO DE LA IGLESIA, T. (2005). “Jóvenes en el conflicto norirlandés: *The Beat of the Drum*, de Martin Waddell”, in Veljka, R. et al. (eds.). *Mundos en conflicto: Representación de ideologías, enfrentamientos sociales y guerras en la literatura infantil y juvenil*, Vigo: Universidad de Vigo, 107:119.
- DOUGLASS, et al. (eds.). (1999). *Basque Politics and Nationalism on the Eve of the Millennium*, Reno: Basque Studies Program-University of Nevada.
- ETXANIZ, X. (2005). “La violencia en la literatura infantil y juvenil vasca”, in Veljka, R. et al. (eds.). op. cit. 185-192.
- KURLANSKY, M. (2001). *The Basque History of the World*. New York: Penguin.
- LÓPEZ GASENI, M. (2000). *Euskarara itzulitako haur eta gazte literatura: funtzioak eraginak eta itzulpen-estrategiak*. Bilbao: UPV-EHU.
- LÓPEZ GASENI, M. & ETXANIZ, X. (2005). *90eko hamarkadako Haur eta Gazte Literatura [La literatura infantil y juvenil de la década de 1990]*. Iruñea: Pamiela.
- OLAZIREGI, M.J. (1999). “La lecture et les jeunes basques”, *Nous voulons lire!* 131, 89-94.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2000). “Aproximación sociológica a los hábitos de lectura de la juventud vasca”, *Oihenart* 18, 79-93.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2003). “Mariasun Landa’s Literary Universe, Or the Awakening of Basque Children’s Literature”, *Bookbird*, 41:2, 35-41.



- 
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2004)a. "Literatura infantil e xuvenil vasca: diálogos desde a marxe", *Boletín Galego de Literatura. Monográfico: Para entenderte mellor. As literaturas infantís e xuvenís do marco ibérico* 32, 2º semestre 2004, 121-139.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2004)b. "Foreword", in *An Anthology of Basque Short Stories*. Reno: Center for Basque Studies-University of Nevada, 11-27.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2005). *Waking the Hedgehog. The Literary Universe of Bernardo Atxaga*. Reno: Center for Basque Studies-University of Nevada.
- REIMER, M. (1997). "Introduction and Violent Children's Texts", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 22:3, 102-104.
- STEINER, G. (2004). *La idea d'Europa*. Barcelona: Editorial ATMArcadia.
- THACKER, D. (2002). "Playful Subversion", in D. Cogan Thacker & J. Webb (eds.). 2002. *Introducing Children's Literature. From Romanticism to Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 139-150.

MANUEL ANTÓNIO PINA'S *AQUILO QUE OS OLHOS VÊEM OU O ADAMASTOR*: IMAGERY, HISTORY AND INTERTEXTUALITY

Sara Reis da Silva

University of Minho, Portugal

sara\_silva@iec.uminho.pt

Resumen

Este artículo trata sobre la historia y lo imaginario y su lugar en la literatura para niños y jóvenes tomando como punto de partida la obra *Aquilo que os Olhos Vêem ou o Adamastor* de Manuel António Pina.

Centrándonos particularmente en el gigante Adamastor, esta lectura intertextual interpretará la recreación de este personaje imaginario en textos diferentes, particularmente en aquellos cuya audiencia principal son los niños los jóvenes, destacando tanto las características similares como distintas que se pueden encontrar y subrayando la innovación semántica de *Aquilo que os Olhos Vêem ou o Adamastor*. En este análisis, el papel de los ur-textos que originaron el propio texto de Pina - procedentes de la tradición oral y representados por la novela popular *Nau Catrineta*, y de la llamada literatura de calidad como *Os Lusíadas* de Camões y *Mensagem* de Fernando Pessoa serán analizados al igual que otros textos para niños como *Bartolomeu Marinheiro* de Afonso Lopes Vieira, *A Nau Mentireta* de Luísa Ducla Soares, *As Naus de Verde Pinho* de Manuel Alegre y *Caçadores de Sonhos* de Miguel Miranda.

**Palabras clave:** Manuel António Pina, history, intertextuality.

Abstract:

This article will reflect upon history and the imaginary, and their place in children and young adults' literature, taking as its starting point Manuel António Pina's play *Aquilo que os Olhos Vêem ou o Adamastor*.