

INTERRELATION BETWEEN CL AND ADULT'S
ON BERNARDO ATXAGA

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Resumen

Bernardo Atxaga es uno de los principales escritores de la LIJ vasca actual, pero también es el principal referente de la literatura vasca para adultos. Estas dos cualidades hacen que nos encontremos ante una de las principales figuras de la literatura vasca y ante un escritor de calidad que publica indistintamente tanto para el público infantil como para el adulto. En el presente trabajo analizamos la influencia que ha tenido la LIJ en la creación literaria para adultos de Atxaga, cómo ha ido evolucionando su literatura para adultos a partir de diversas obras infantiles y juveniles. Es decir, la importancia y función que ha tenido la LIJ en la producción literaria para adultos en Bernardo Atxaga.

Palabras claves: LIJ influencia en la literatura de adultos.

Abstract

Bernardo Atxaga is one of the main writers of the Basque CL at present-day, and he is also the most important reference in the Basque literature for adults. These

two qualities represent one of the most outstanding figures of the Basque literature and a writer of great talent who publishes for either children or adults. This essay is to analyze the influence, which CL has had in Atxaga's literary creation for adults, and how his literature has developed starting from several child and junior works. That is, the great importance and the role that CL has played over B. Atxaga literary production for grown-ups.

Key words: CL influence in literature for adults.



CL has always been present in Bernardo Atxaga's work. Practically from the start, in the beginning of the 80's, this renowned writer has published works destined to all sort of public indistinctly. First, together with J.C. Eguillor, Atxaga publishes two surrealist stories for children in 1980. *Nikolasaren abenturak eta kalenturak* (Antonio San Roman) and *Ramuntxo detektibea*. (*Nikolasaren abentura gehio*) (Antonio San Roman) The way Atxaga and CL came across is casual, as told by Atxaga in an interview, it was a proposal from J.C. Eguillor- a very unconventional person who managed to attract his attention and to collaborate- and so were his two first children's stories written.

Nik pentsatu nuen sekula ez nuela genero hori landuko. Halatan, egun batez, nik hau literaturan garantzi izugarria duen sujeta aurkitu nuen: ilustratzaile bat, Juan Karlos Eguillor. (...) Halako batean, berak niri haurrentzat liburu bat egitea proposatzeak pittin bat eskemak apurtu zizkidan ze, ez zegoen niretzat loturarik abangoardia (literaturaren zentzurik gogorrean), esperientzia, bizitza eta haur literaturaren artean. Pittin bat bere bitartez, pentsatu nuen bazegoela zirrikitu bat haur literaturan sartzeko. (Atxaga, 2001: 16).

"I never thought I would work this genre. However once I met a person of great relevance for the CL: an illustrator, Juan Carlos Eguillor (...) The fact that I was suggested to write stories for children really stroke me, the relation among vanguard (in the most strict literary sense), experience, life and children's literature did not exist. Thanks mostly to him, I thought there was a slight chance for me to be introduced to the CL."

That way, Atxaga and Eguillor accomplished a couple of works, which show the "pop" atmosphere of the time, from the aesthetic and illustrative point of view as

well as in their plot. Two months after being published, Atxaga decides to become a professional. He gives up his job in the banking sector to devote himself to literature. "I got my first author rights thanks to those stories" He declared in a chat published in *Behinola* (2001:16)

Gradually, Atxaga begins to combine his works for adults and the CL, in the 80's as a professional, this writer from Asteasu published eighteen books for children and young readers; but together with this work, a deep thought over the CL comes out. In 1986, he takes part in a series of conferences on the CL and at the end of the 90's; he published some of his ideas over this concept in the Media Vaca Publishing:

"When we talk about children's literature we should tip the balance on the first term of the expression, in the strictly literary aspects. (...) forget these sensationalist and too childish literature; "not stuffing the mouth" with the word "children". Let those ideas die. It was not from words that the best literature for children was written. On the contrary, the best authors emphasized the literary aspects of their work and were convinced as I said before that writing for children or adults is basically the same thing". (Atxaga. 1999 a, 10-17).

Or about the readers of these works.

"As in a children's story, there are ghosts who aren't higher than one and a half metres of those kids who are going to read the story you are working on, those are the ones responsible for children literature, though being the same, although sharing a lot of the characteristics in adult's, to be different at the same time. Feeling them so near and fearing their disapproval, the writer considers aspects which sometimes forgets and writes a tale like *Peter Pan* and not, for instance, a six hundred pages novel, or a theatre play in verse". (Op. Cit. 20-21)

Atxaga has discussed this idea, this concern for the reader implied in his work, on many occasions especially after *Behi Euskaldun Baten memoriak*. (1991) *Memories of a cow* was published:

"When you are writing in a child register you always think that in the stalls, in your imagination, there's a row of children about twelve years old who are listening to you, who really set the whole process of writing. However, there could also be

a critic, a poetry reader, a businessperson, etc. This presence of the "audience" is a creative censorship when you are writing (...) it was fundamental to me when I realized that having other people's influence on your work is not negative in any sense. This social pressure, the reader's presence when creating, can make your work much better than at first, you might have expected. (*El Mundo* 23-12-93, pag. 86)

The thing is, Atxaga (Habe n° 208.1992) admires Stevenson who wrote a wonderful novel *The treasure Island* for his twelve-year-old godson but which has engaged readers from twenty to sixty years-old. It is not a coincidence that Atxaga mentions this idea just after *Memories of a cow* was published, an appealing novel for the young as well as for adults. However, there has been a great evolution since Nikolasa's tales until the adventures of the cow Mo came along.

In this first works for children (there are several theatre plays for children: "Prakaman" played by Kilikilariak, "Jimmi Pottolo eta Zapataria" and "Logale zeukan trapezistaren" played by Maskarada, at the end of the 70's but those written versions were mislaid) the humour, the surrealist situation and the fantasy, clearly influenced by the English *nonsense* play a very important role. But also the extreme care in the use of language, with frequent onomatopoeia, repetitions, the personality of the characters through language, etc. show a very strong tendency towards innovative literature, aesthetically neat, illustrated by Eguillor. Apart from the two tales edited by Antonio San Roman in 1980, Atxaga and Eguillor publish *Chuck Aramberri dentista baten etxean* (Erein, 1982) one of the first works in basque modern literature for children. (Etxaniz, 1997).

That same year *Antonino Apreta* (Erein, 1982), is published, a children's tale on which the series "Siberiako Trenearen ipuin eta Kantak" (The tale's and songs from the Tran Siberian). The fantasy is present in this work influenced by traditional literature, but not by surrealism, *nonsense* and the exaggeration of his first works. The evolution on Atxaga's CL is taking place, but when two of his junior works are published in 1984, there is a breaking-off with "pop" literature. This year three beautiful short stories complete the series begun with *Antonino Apreta: Txitoen istoria* (Erein, 1984), *Jimmi Potxolo* (Erein, 1984) and *Asto bat hypodromoan* (Erein, 1984). Atxaga tells us about a family of chicks-cinema-goers from London, a lonely, hungry bear and the rebellion of horses in a hippodrome led by a donkey, there are some territorial elements included in these three stories- references to fables, for instance- with other modern elements- the cinema world or the value of intelligence-.

Nevertheless, the great change on Atxaga's CL is caused with the publishing that same year of two of his works for juniors: *Bi letter jaso nituen oso denbora gutxian* (Erein), and *Sugean txoriari begiratzan dihonean* (Erein) the latter was awarded with the Lizardi Price in 1983. Atxaga is going through a creative process from which he looks on to the future (renovation of subjects, originality on his ideas, arguments, points of view etc. With a literature very close to tradition in many ways. The language selection, the settings, the context of his work begin to turn around an undetermined territory (neither spatial nor temporary) Obaba.

These two works, together with *Bi anai* (Erein, 1985) shape the Obaba cycle, in J. Kortazar words: "The three compose what's known as the Obaba cycle. That is, the creation of a mythical world, a space which is all spaces". (Kortazar, 2003: 53). With these stories, Atxaga begins a process interrelating CL and works for adults, a way in which Youthful Literature above all has been useful to experiment or advance in different literary proposals. *Bi letter jaso nituen denbora gutxian* (Dos letters), for example, is a first experiment that Kortazar (2000:198) has called "The Chinese boxes technique", An account divided and united by the stories. The influence of oral literature is notorious, which will be so important years later in the making of *Oabakoak* (Erein, 1988). In addition, the linguistic game played when old Martin, the main character of the story, uses Euskara-English: And, after all, I do not regret the decision I made, no sir, no mister. Because what did I have when I was living in my country? Nothing at all, To say in a few words, (Atxaga 1990: 11)

The same as years later with Mr. Smith in *Obabakoak*; and so, as I. Aldecoa explains (2004: 216) these stories "set up the following links" in the consolidation of Atxaga's works.

Peter Handkek (*El Pais*, 1989-09-03) talked about the relation that exist among the landscape, the memory and silence. Atxaga through his youthful works started the way towards such relationship approaching the traditional and modern literature, the CL and adult's literature.

In 1987, Atxaga published a serie of books gathered in the collection "Flanery eta Bere Astakiloak" a very ambitious project (tales, cartoons and record) which, as far as innovation and literary contribution is concerned, it is not very important. A group of donkey musicians go all over the world with their songs... and adventures.

The characters, the events, the use of the language, etc, remind us of previous works of the author

On the contrary, *Behi euskaldun baten memoriak* (Pamiela, 1991), *Memories of a cow*, make a turn of the screw in the evolution of this author after winning the The National Literature Prize with *Obabakoak* (1988). In an interview made for *E.Egunkaria* newspaper (8-12-1991) Atxaga vindicated the reading of youthful literature from any public including adults. "*Memories of a cow*" is a novel with several storytellers and characters, in which the cow Mo plays the main role, but its conscience as well. La Vache qui Rit of Pauline Bernardette, a very singular nun. Above all, it is a novel with several reading levels (from the book adventure, to the initiative novel or an allegation against fascism and in favour of personal development) and a realistic novel. Atxaga escapes from the indefinite space and time to place us in an specific town and period: The Basque Country (Balzategui) in 1940. This involves a twist towards the realist novel in the author's trajectory, as explained by professor Kortazar, the youthful literature turns to be an experimental field to him again: "literature for the young had made the author work with a material without too much compromise, to experience techniques which later would be used in works of higher spirit" (Kortazar, 2003: 62). In effect, in the 90's after this turn with *Memories of a cow* Atxaga published *Gizona bere bakar-dadean*, 1993 (*The lonely man*)⁸ and *Zeru horiek*, 1995 (*The lonely woman*). As Marijo Olaziregi remarked: In the 90's Atxaga abandoned the imaginary realm of Obaba and published two realist novels" (Olaziregi 2005: 214)

Atxaga evolves to a new use of language, more in tune with the subject matter and the structure of his new works: so, the change we notice in *Behi euskaldunen baten memoriak* regarding *Bi letter....* does not only concern the level of intrigue, thought, or the adventures we can find in the first one. We can also notice it in a more up-to-date, current language, even in the use of language as an element by itself.

These changes, especially on the subject matter, of Atxaga's literature have been pointed out by several researches, so, I. Aldekoa thinks, *Behi euskaldun baten memoriak* (1991) opens the door from reality to fiction, and the historic time penetrates neatly in Atxaga's storytelling. (Aldekoa, 2004: 259); and Kortazar tells us

that. "In 1993 Bernardo Atxaga makes a turn in his narrative skills. The places of the memory are now looking for the space in the troubled present of the actual problems in the Basque Country" (Kortazar, op.cit: 60)

Once more, the CL is the key to understand the development on Atxaga's literary production, which, from this point, begins to show what L. Otegui has called "the Jewish vision of Atxaga" in other words, the need to think over and to know the basque reality. *Behi euskaldun baten memoriak* is, therefore full of references from the basque culture from folk songs, G. Aresti poems to popular sayings.

But apart from all this, the youthful novel was useful to "re-direct" the reading expectatives (according to Jauss) originated by *Obabakoak*. After the success of this work many readers expected a second delivery of a new work in the mythical Obaba atmosphere (as it can be seen in the critics obtained by *Behi euskaldun baten memoriak*, where there are constant references to *Obabakoak*) and so be able to write and publish the new realist novel of the 90 decade.

But, after the experience when *Obabakoak* was published in Spanish, Atxaga finds himself the challenge of publishing and creating his works in two languages, in euskara and spanish, this question becomes more acute after *Gizona bere bakar-dadean* published in 1993 and *Zeru horiek* in 1995. Due to all this in 1996 Atxaga recovers an idea written ten years earlier, that of a writer must use all the languages he's got at hand. Therefore, thanks to a youthful work, *Sara treneko gizona* (1996), he experiments with the creative process in two languages at the same time. From a radio script written in euskara sixteen years before, he writes a novel published in spanish in two newspapers by instalment and later as a book, with some small touches and the one in euskara translated. Manu Lopez Gaseni (2005) has analysed in detail the process of self-translation by some authors of the basque CL, bringing out the particular case of this novel and it is from here, as Atxaga admits that he has endured an evolution in the process of his literary creation.

Behi euskaldunen baten memoriak (1991) and *Sara izeneko gizona* (1996) are credited as the culmination of his experimental grade of the CL from Atxaga. The Basque writer has found the answer to his problems, he has been able to re-create a new style from his works, but most of all he has found the key and the guidelines he needs in his work as writer.

Subsequently, his works for the CL has served the purpose, mainly, to give humour, critic an irony a free hand. That is why he has used different animals again to be the characters in most of this books, perhaps, as professor Kortazar remarks, to make us feel closer to those who are rejected (Kortazar, 2000: 213) that is how Bambulo and Xola the dog character in his book come out. Now then, while Bambulo is a bookworm dog and therefore he can tell many stories (many of them based on historic events) whose characters are relatives, Xola is a very peculiar dog that lives with its master.

Those three books in which Bambulo is the main character, (*Krisia, Lehen urratsak y Ternuako penak*) were published in 1998 and 1999. The first two, contain different stories and anecdotes, useful to draw us near history and traditional literature, to myths and historic events (from the battle of Troy to Admunsen and Scott expedition to the south pole, including Goya works of art) everything is told wittily from a dog's points of view *Ternuak penak* (1999), however, is an adventure novel, based on the story of a basque fisherman and his adversities through the winter in Terranova. Bambulo loses his prominence in front of the innuit and a young sailor of fifteen, Urkizu, who decides to spend the winter with them. The hunger, loneliness, cultural differences... manage to capture the reader in this novel of adventures, being this work more dramatic than humorous (the opposite of Bambulo's previous stories).

Xola, on the contrary is an urban dog, a small dog, which, through ignorance, believes it is a lion or a great wild boar hunter. The tone and style of these works are completely different with the only purpose of making people laugh and have a good time. Here we find much simpler stories in their structure (Getting to the idea of simplicity that I. Calvino mentioned 1989) and with the characters, usually, well known and personalized. And as the critics from Catalonia P. Molist y J. Portel (2006:221) remarked, have captured the audience and critics for their human attitude in their different adventures, becoming a reference of the CL.

The stories belonging to this collection are independent, and focus one subject, a concern or situation that Xola characterizes; Hence, *Xolak badu lehoien berri* (1995) comes from a conversation overheard by Xola which makes him think he is a lion. The troubles Xola will go through will make him take things philosophically and with a certain pragmatism. Then Xola decides to go on being just a simple,

quiet dog. Something similar to what happens when Xola and Grogo, his master, are invited to go hunting in *Xola eta basurdeak* (1996) and in which Xola's attitude towards compromises changes radically when he discovers what boars are like. Written with easy language, using time accurately and with a great amount of humour, this work won the Euskadi Award of the CL.

Xola eta Angelito (2004) the last issue of this collection deepens into irony, criticism and humour. Xola, a city-dog, meets Angelito another dog similar to him who lives in a cottage. The cultural and social differences are noticeable in the dog's attitude and in their use of the language as well. Finally, Xola, after meeting Angelito, will end up adapting himself to her realistic and functional way of life. Angelito, pragmatically, will win this battle between country life and life in the city, as we can see in the talk they have at the end of the story:

- What a nerve you've got ; exclaimed Shola. - and when it suits you, you'll say that you don't like cheese; And what's the matter with the strategy? What about Rato?

- Stop asking questions and try the cheese, Shola. -Angelito told her-It is delicious

- Well, if you insist, I will try it.

Shola had a bite of cheese. It was really good, delicious.

Don't eat all of it, please, ho he said to Angeliño

They lied down next to the folding screen and went on eating until the cheese was finished.

We had a nice dinner, didn't we? - Angeliño said.

We had a marvellous dinner; Shola said. (Atxaga, 2006:66-67)

Atxaga shows in this last work in the CL a clear intention to amuse the readers, to entertain and make them have a good time through his adventures. In other words, he wants to make reading pleasant and so he uses different literary resources masterly, which he has been polishing for over thirty years. The question is the CL has been for Atxaga a field to experiment and improve the literary for adults, the same way the CL has contributed to make his writing better and with a remarkable quality.

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