

# The Basque literary system at the gateway to the new millennium

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*Artikulu honek Londresen 2000ko uztailean egin zen "1st International Symposium on Basque Cultural Studies" delakoan irakurritako hitzaldia jasotzen du. Bertan, egungo euskal literatur sistemaren deskribapena egiten abalegindu nintzen, hau da, euskal literatur testuen produkzioa, bitartekaritza eta barrera barneratzen dituen egituraren deskribapena. Euskal literaturak mende honetan izandako igoera kuantitatibo eta kualitatiboa aztertu ondoren, etorkizuneko erronkak zeintzuk izango lirakeen aurkeztera ere ausartu ginen. Hldo honetan, euskal lanen itzulpena, kritikagintzaren indartzea eta plazerezko irakurketa literarioaren aldeko aldarrikapena izan zen gurea.*

*Giltz-Hitzak: Euskal Literatura. Literatur Kritika.*

*El presente artículo recoge la conferencia pronunciada en Londres con motivo del "1st International Symposium on Basque Cultural Studies" en julio del año 2000. En ella se trata de llevar a cabo la descripción del sistema de la literatura vasca, es decir, la descripción de la estructura que comprende la producción de textos literarios en euskara, la intermediación y su acogida. Tras estudiar el avance, tanto cuantitativo como cualitativo, experimentado por la literatura vasca durante el siglo, se presentan los retos que habrán de afrontarse en el futuro. En este sentido, nuestro trabajo finaliza con un alegato en favor de la traducción de la literatura vasca, el desarrollo de la crítica y el gusto por la lectura literaria.*

*Palabras Clave: Literatura Vasca. Crítica Literaria.*

*Cet article recueille la conférence prononcée à Londres à l'occasion du "1st International Symposium on Basque Cultural Studies" en juillet 2000 dans laquelle on essaie d'effectuer la description du système de la littérature basque, c'est-à-dire la description de la structure qui comprend la production de textes littéraires en euskara, l'interposition et son acceptation. Après avoir étudié la progression, aussi bien quantitative que qualitative, expérimentée par la littérature basque au cours du siècle, on présente les défis que l'on devra affronter dans le futur. Notre travail se termine par une plaidoirie en faveur de la traduction de la littérature basque, le développement de la critique et le goût pour la lecture littéraire.*

*Mots Clés: Littérature Basque. Critique Littéraire.*

**“We write a strange language”**

(...)

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; (...)  
 Its sleep was long, its bibliography brief  
 (but in the twentieth century the hedgehog awoke)

*BERNARDO ATXAGA. (Translation: Margaret Jull Costa)*

When discussing the challenges faced by Basque literature at the gateway to the new millennium, it is practically inevitable to recall the well known work of Italo Calvino. As you will remember, this Italian author suggested that brevity, lightness and energy were the principal characteristics of new literature. And it is these same characteristics that we are going to take into account during this intervention in the attempt to give a short description of the Basque literary system.

This said, most people here today in London probably think it is easy to be brief on the subject of our literature, due to the fact that written Basque literature in the strictest sense is a phenomenon dating from the end of the 19th century. Since the publication of the first book in the Basque language in 1545 until 1879, a mere total of 101 books were published, of which only 4 were literary works. Adopting a metaphor to which Bernardo Atxaga often takes recourse, we could affirm that Basque literature is like a hedgehog that has been sleeping for years, a peculiar hedgehog that has suddenly awakened from its sleep in the 20th century. And it can be said that this awakening has enjoyed its greatest moment during over the last thirty years, not only due to the fact that a favourable legal situation has been followed by the backing of more solid structures, but because we are now seeing the appearance of a strictly literary production. If in days gone by The Gernika Oak was a source of inspiration for William Wordsworth, or the selfsame Bertold Brecht fell in love with the moon of Bilbao, in recent years, and particularly after the success of *Obabakoak* (1988), the experts have started including Basque literature in western literary tradition. Thus, paraphrasing the words of Atxaga in reference to T. S. Eliot's article “Tradition and Individual Talent” (1920), the world has opened itself to us like an immense Alexandria so that, in today's world, we have access to authors from different places and periods. In other words, all cultural activities are conditioned by the tension between the particular and the universal.

But the problem is that Basque literature still hasn't found its place in this immense Alexandria, or, to put it another way, the Basque University's motto of “Eman ta zabal zazu” (“Spread your fruit throughout the world”) doesn't seem to have much of an influence, at least as far as literature is concerned. This and our present day literary system are going to be our subject of discussion throughout the following paragraphs.

### **The Basque literary system**

The Polysystem Theory developed by Itamar Even-Zohar of Tel Aviv University, among others, offers us interesting methodological instruments with which to study

the literature of different languages. Going beyond the limits of formalist approximations, it defines literature itself as a socio-cultural system, and studies the interacting variables of literary communication. The notion of "system" therefore demands the functional definition of literary activity and specification of the relations established between the leading characters taking part in it.

Along similar lines, when talking about the Basque literary system, we should point out that we are talking about a structure comprising the production, mediation and reception of Basque literary texts. Within this structure, the contribution of critics, for example, would fall within the category of mediation.

Coming to the field of production, it is a well known fact that Basque autonomous literary activity, in our case, became institutionalised in the 50s, and that the legal conditions for its development were enacted after Franco's death, i.e., after the so-called Transition to Democracy. The Decrees on Bilingualism (1982) promulgated on approval of the Autonomy Statute (1979) injected new life into Basque literary production. This new situation, together with the subsidies granted then (and now) to publications, gave rise to the creation of new publishing houses. This all left its mark on the production of books in the Basque language, a factor more than obvious from the resulting figures: if between 1876 and 1975, 31.5 books were published per year, in the period 1976-1994 this number rose to 659.2 for the same period of time. Moreover, we can see that, in 1998, 1,458 books were published, of which, according to the UNESCO classification, 14.2% were literature, 26% were literature for children and youths, and 32.6% were textbooks. Also particularly interesting is the fact that this percentage has dropped over recent years, and is now comparable to the publication percentage of our neighbouring languages. But what has not changed is the supremacy and predominance of narrative over the other genres. According to the latest figures, 59% of all literature published is of the narrative genre, 10.1% is poetry and 6.3% drama. We don't have figures for recent years on literary criticism, since the last information we have on this subject dates from the period 1976-1994. Only 4% of literary publications mentioned literary criticism at that time.

Turning our attention to the situation of publishing houses, the most recent study issued by the Asociación de Editores de Euskadi (Basque Publisher's Association, 1999) in the Basque Autonomous Community states that there are currently 100 publishing houses, 35% of which were created after 1990. We should point out that these are generally small publishers, with an average of 4 employees, and that they are usually worlds apart from the promotional campaigns of the big publishers in neighbouring languages. Let's look at a few details on the subject: almost half of all publications are sold through bookshops and other kinds of modern sales points (mail purchase, door-to-door, the Internet, or in the big supermarkets) that don't tend to be particularly successful for us. Today most Basque publisher's find it hard to make ends meet, which is probably the reason behind the reduced investment in promotion and advertising observed over recent years.

Bringing this chapter on production to an end, we would now like to give a few details about the writers. Taking note of the fact that there are now some 300 writers in the Basque language, their sociological features can be summed up as follows:

90% are men and only 10% women. Their average age is 49 (70% fall within the 30-50 age group), thus demonstrating that contemporary, active authors come from all kinds of generations. An example of this are the writers born in the 20s and 30s (Txillardegui, etc.), or those making up the so-called '64 Generation' (authors like Saizarbitoria, Lertxundi, Urkizu, Urretabizkaia), or those forming part of what is now known as *the Literary Autonomy Generation*, that is, comprising authors born after 1950 (Atxaga, Iturralde, Sarrionandia, E. Jimenez, Laura Mintegi, Oñederra, Landa, etc.); or the generation of authors born in the 60s and who started publishing in the 80s (Aristi, Zabala, Xabier Mendiguren, Epaltza, Borda etc.). 60% of these writers have university degrees, and only 6% make a living out of writing. We must likewise underline the fact that most Basque writers are also teachers.

One undoubtedly interesting detail in all of this information is the scarce numbers of women writers. One of the reasons behind this scarcity could well be the scant promotional attention and obscurity to which they were prone for years. As in most western literary traditions, the Basque literary institutions have turned their backs on the literary production of women. Starting from the scarce importance given to women at different moments in the history of Basque literature (so obvious in the case of the doctoral thesis written by Professor L. White),<sup>1</sup> and continuing with their rare presence in literary competitions and textbooks (see Olaziregi, M.J.:1999),<sup>2</sup> it is obvious that female writers still have to overcome more than one hurdle in order to become full and normal members of the literary market. Among these obstacles we have to emphasise the discrimination established by the criticism of our neighbouring literature since, it is well known, we too have the temptation to put all of the texts written by women in the same bag (it's not a question of literature, but rather of "literature written by women"), or the tendency to qualify this work with the stale adjective of "intimist".

Rounding off this section on writers in the Basque language, I would like to underline the influence of the literary platforms that appeared in the 80s on the rise in the number of writers. We believe that these platforms somehow succeeded in repairing the weaknesses of the Basque Literary Institution since, as we already know, at that time neither university nor school studies in Basque were consolidated. As with the situation under the influence of the resurgence of Basque literature experienced during the period 1876-1936 (remember that at that time more than 140 publications were created in the Basque Country), during the 80s there was a remarkable increase in literary reviews (see *Pott, Oh! Euzkadi, Susa, Idatz eta Mintz, Maiatz, Kandela*, etc.) which went on to become essential platforms for the new generations.

These were years that saw an increase in the number of organisations necessary for the defence of authors. It was during this time that the *Basque Writer's Association*—*EIE* (1982) was created, or the *Basque Translator's Association*—*EIZIE* (1987). As

(1) White, L., *Emakumeen hitzak euskaraz: Basque Women writers of the twentieth century*, Nevada, University of Reno, 1996

(2) Olaziregi, M.J., *Intimismoaz haraindi: Emakumezkoek idatzitako euskal literatura* [Beyond Intimism: Basque Literature written by Women], Donostia, Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1999.

far as translators are concerned, we should mention the Martutene Translator's School, created in 1980 on the initiative of Euskaltzaindia, or the postgraduate master offered by Deusto University and the University of the Basque Country since the 90s. This process of professionalisation and consolidation was finally to see the fulfilment of one of the objectives it had been struggling to achieve for years: the creation of a Degree in Translation and Interpretation at the University of the Basque Country. Seen from today's point of view, there is absolutely no doubt that the essential contribution of Basque translators has a strengthening and enriching effect on literary language. It is therefore now possible, thus enriching the literary horizon of Basque readers, to read books in the Basque language by Lermontov, Woolf, Joyce, Stevenson or Primo Levi, which, apart from being highly recommendable, is also a great pleasure. Whatever the case, we should point out that this entire universal heritage translated into Basque has not yet received the attention it deserves from the Basque critics, with the exception of the doctoral thesis recently defended by Manu Lopez (2000). Taking recourse to the concept used by Even-Zohar, we could affirm that *translations, literature for children and youths, or literature written by women* are areas that are treated completely marginally and peripherally by the Basque literary system.

We would now like to take a look at the aspect of *literary reception*, since this is precisely the weakest part of our literary system. Despite the important increase of publishers in the Basque language, and the fact that the increased growth in the number of copies printed suggests an increasing number of readers, we are all aware that the sociological profile of the Basque reader is still an incognito. Although lacking in in-depth up-to-date research into the subject, the different studies carried out on different groups of readers in the Basque language give us some idea of the partial diagnosis of today's situation. Among these studies we could quote, for example, the sociological study which I prepared for my doctoral thesis, in which I analysed 3,000 young, bilingual Basque speakers, or the study carried out in 1996 by SIADECO for the *Egunkaria* newspaper. Although this is neither the time nor the place to talk about the results of these studies, I would nevertheless like to point out at least two very important details on the subject. On the one hand, we can see that the tendency to read in Basque decreases with age, and that this tendency has too close a relationship with the educational circuit. On the other hand, literate Basque speakers of between 20 and 39 years of age are not normally great readers (36% of them do not even read one single Basque book a year).<sup>3</sup>

It would seem that, despite the fact that 100,000 new Basque speakers were created in the Basque Autonomous Country as a result of the Law on Bilingualism, this increase gave rise to fewer readers than expected. On the one hand, therefore, we

(3) Although it might come as something of a surprise, the results of the survey carried out in November 1999 by the Gremio de Editores de Euskadi (Basque Publisher's Group) were similar to those obtained four years previously as a result of the survey carried out on students. The favourite novels of the over-16s were: *The Pillars of the Earth*, *The Physician*, *A Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The House of Spirits* and *Paula*. Bernardo Atxaga was the Basque author mentioned most (29 times) and his book *Obabakoak* was the title quoted most (11 times).

see that many of the youngsters who have studied in Basque have not acquired an actual liking for reading in this language and that, on the other hand, the Basque literature market is still too strongly related to the teaching world. Most of the Basque books considered as best sellers are closely linked to school programmes, and the failed attempts at publishing a series of pocketbooks highlight the limits of the market faced by Basque literature (selling 1,000 copies of a book by somebody who is not very well known would be an extraordinary feat).<sup>4</sup>

To round off this picture, even though it is too brief, of the Basque literary system, I would now like to mention the *middlemen*. These include a recently created figure we mustn't forget: that of the literary agent. This figure, well known in the literature of other languages, is completely new to our language. In fact it would seem that the first Basque agency (Ikeder) was created in 1995 on the Spanish side of the Basque Country. This said, it is a well known fact that very few writers take recourse to agents, since the authors can easily take care of their own business in the small world of Basque literature, unless the work is translated into other languages. As well as literary agents, we would like to mention other elements with a potential influence on the promotion of literary works, such as literary awards, which have gradually decreased since the 80s. Not forgetting the unquestionable importance of certain literary awards as far as the promotion of writers is concerned (the case of Atxaga is paradigmatic in this sense), it is probably more important or effective on the present Basque literature market to have a work continuously announced in the media than it is to win an award. By media, we mean the growth experienced in recent years by the Basque press. Despite the fact that this brief mention refers to a subject that deserves deeper analysis, we would like to recall the dynamic effect that the newspaper supplements on Basque culture have had on the literary world. Although it is true that, in the case of television, the programmes dedicated to literature are still all too few (the programme *Sautrela* started this year and, despite its praiseworthiness, has to work hard at overcoming its unfortunate broadcasting time), the press and the radio nevertheless tend to give detailed information of new publications.

And that's precisely the root of the problem, that most of the time they only provide information. The thing is that, if any one particular factor stands out on the subject of the criticism of Basque literature, it has got to be its scarcity. We have to say that no contemporary Basque authors have actually complained about this lack of criticism. But the reason is not the lack of critics, there are actually plenty of them, but rather the fact that these critics mostly stop at giving a few details or references about the books. So that's the problem at the end of day, the absence of criticism, and

(4) We believe it is necessary to specify what volume of sales we are referring to when we talk about best sellers. Taking account of the fact that the Basque speaking population is 700,000, and that, according to different studies carried out, the number of potential readers is 60,000, it is obvious that the sales figures given herein are extremely high. The author to have sold most books is unquestionably Bernardo Atxaga. Some of his titles, such as *Obabakoak*, *Bi letter* or *Bebi euskaldun baten memoriak*, have sold 50,000 copies. These titles are followed by others such as J.M. Irigoien's *Babilonia*, P. Aristi's *Kcap-po*, or the famous *110 Streeteko geltokia* by Iñaki Zabaleta, all of which have sold over 30,000 copies.

we would have to see just who is ready to accept real criticism in this small country where everyone knows everyone else.

In my opinion, one particularly illustrative specification on the list of downfalls regarding Basque criticism is that made on the subject by N. Frye. According to Frye, a difference should be made on the one hand between the *academic criticism* of the more closed circuits, which is mainly based on a series of theoretical or methodological paradigms, and assumes a critical reasoning and distance. On the other, we have the so-called *public criticism*, comprising the comments, reviews, interviews, etc. published in the media or in general or specialised reviews. The objectives of public criticism would be to inform, circulate or promote certain works. Although it is true that the two kinds of criticism do not exactly have to function hand-in-hand, in our case the rift between them is tremendous.<sup>5</sup> It is currently difficult to find comments in the Basque press or publications that are more than simply informative. That's why Basque writers complain, because after the publication's interview of the day, most of the work goes by unnoticed.

But this hasn't always been the case. Casting our minds back a little, we soon come across periods when literary criticism raised far more questions than it does nowadays. On the one hand, is the debate of the 30s on Basque literature.<sup>6</sup> On the other, we can underline the literary debates of the 80s. In the case of the former, the advocates of post-symbolist poetry rose against the supporters of post-romanticist poetry. In the latter, however, it was the kind of criticism that was put to debate. And somewhere along the line are the interesting works published by Koldo Mitxelena in the review *Egan* during the 50s, or those published a few years previously by Andima Ibinagabeitia in *Euzko Gogoia*.

It is actually very significant that the author whom for years enjoyed the most outstanding reputation as far as the Basque literary institution is concerned was a philologist, the great Koldo Mitxelena (1915-1987). As you will recall, his well know article ("Our irresistible ascension from poetry to science", *Muga* 19, 1982-12-21, 5-19) unleashed enormous controversy in the early 80s. In this article, together with his criticism of UZEI and the standardisation of Basque, he also made a sharp attack on the critics of the period. In Mitxelena's opinion, the criticism was lacking in quantity, quality and impartiality. Among the over one hundred replies generated by this article, the replies of Joxe Azurmendi ("UZEI auzitan edo normalizazio bideak auzitan" [UZEI or standardisation called into question], *Jakin*, 1982) or Josu Landa ("Oker zabiltza, Mitxelena, oso oker" [You're wrong, Mitxelena, very wrong], *Jakin*, 1982) defended exactly the opposite stance, affirming that more criticism was published then than had been in the period 1950-70.

(5) It would seem, in the literary production of our surrounding areas, that there has been a certain reduction in the distance between these two types of criticism. That, at least, is the opinion of critic Darío Villanueva on the peculiarities of Spanish criticism. See D. Villanueva (dir.), *Historia y Crítica de la Literatura Española*, vol 9, Barcelona, Crítica, 1992.

(6) See Aranbarri, I. & Izagirre, K., 1996, *Gerraurreko literatur kritika*, Amorebietako Udala-Labayru, 1996.

Some years later, the debate on Basque criticism moved towards the field of different kinds of criticism. The advocates of impressionist criticism and of scientific or academic criticism used reviews like *Ob! Euzkadi* to channel their debates. It was at this time, for example, that Ramon Etxezarreta made his affirmations against scientific criticism (see: "Ez du Jon Kortazarrek zure plazerraren sentazioa neurtuko, Tere" [Jon Kortazar is not going to measure the sensation of your pleasure, Tere!], *Ob! Euzkadi*, 1981) or that we heard the voice raised in favour of scientific and impressionist criticism by Mikel Hernandez (see: "Badakigu EUTG ez dela mundu osoa. Inor ez da idiota" ["We know the EUTG is not the whole world. Nobody is stupid"], *Ob! Euzkadi*, 1981).

The article "Kritikak eta kritikoak azken euskal literaturan" [Critics in the most recent literature] (*Jakin* 49, October-December 1988, pp. 73-86) published by Manu Lopez, clearly reflects the content of debates during those years; and in fact the same could be said of the revision made by Jon Kortazar in the foreword to his book *Luma eta Lurra* [*The feather and the earth*] (BBK/Labayru, 1997:29). As Kortazar reminds us, the journalist Felix Ibargutxi labelled 1987 as "The year that worried all writers" on resuming the main debates to have taken place that year. Once again casting our minds back a while, we will come across Jon Juaristi's criticism of the book *Antología de la narrativa vasca actual*; Antton Azkargorta's criticism of *Henry Bengoa Inventarium* by Atxaga, Ordorika and Iturralde; Pako Aristi's misogynous criticism of A. Urretabizkaia's novel *Saturno*; Joxerra Garzia's criticism of the style of Laura Mintegi's novel, *Bai... baina ez!* [Yes... but no!]; the crossfire criticism between Mikel Hernandez Abaitua and Jon Juaristi after the Verines meetings; or the criticisms that arose at the Galeusca in Valencia. Seen from today's point of view, the passions and controversies of those years came at a moment when criticism, no matter what kind, was considered completely necessary and essential. Since then, as a result of the disappearance of many of these publications, there have been fewer and fewer moments of convergence between these two models of criticism.

No matter what the case, if any one thing has been obvious over recent years, it is the development of so-called academic criticism; and this development is the direct result of the university centres that sprouted throughout the 80s. Let us remind you that, in 1981, the first 20 students graduated in Basque Philology from Deusto University (a few years later the same thing was to happen in the University of the Basque Country). That same year, under the direction of Jean Haritschelhar, the Basque Studies Department was created at the University of Bordeaux III. In August 1980, the first Basque Language and Literature teaching posts were created at colleges in Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia. And it is precisely the students who have continued graduating from these educational centres who have injected Basque criticism with the energy and modernity it had been lacking to date. Despite the fact that the brevity of this article makes it impossible to detail all of the progress to have been made in this respect,<sup>7</sup> I would nevertheless like to underline at least two

(7) In order to learn about the evolution of literary studies in recent years, we recommend that you read the following article: Olaziregi, M.J., "La historiografía literaria vasca (1990-1996). Resumen crítico bibliográfico", *Cuadernos de Alzate* 16, May 1997, pp. 185-190.



aspects. In the first place, our studies are based on the weakest field of Basque literary studies, that is, on the historiography of a certain literary production of marginal and peripheral location. We are referring to the thesis of the above-mentioned Linda White, or to the thesis on the history of children's literature defended in 1996 by professor Xabier Etxaniz. On the other hand, we must underline the remarkable increase in the number of women researchers to have carried out their doctoral thesis over the last decade.<sup>8</sup>

### A multitude of suggestions plus one on the challenges of the Basque literary system

The Basque literary system described above bears witness to more than one weakness. To end our intervention, we will therefore give a brief summary of the objectives which we believe should be fulfilled in the new millennium.

1. *The pleasure of reading.* As we have very clearly expressed in above points, the reception aspect is still the weakest part of our literary system. That is, the reading of literature is still closely related to teaching, people do not read in Basque for simple pleasure, but for a series of practical reasons (to improve their level of Basque, to pass exams, etc.). Although neighbouring literatures also show that the reader-book relationship is not exactly passionate, our problem is more serious. As demonstrated by a series of experts (including Schüking, Escarpit, Blanchot, etc.), the love of reading solely based on school learning does not last. It is time we became a people who read for the simple pleasure of doing so. I would like to recall the words pronounced by Tomás de Kempis in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, "I looked for pleasure in all things, but found it only in a book". In order for that to happen, we have to eradicate obsolete and pernicious educational models once and for all, or the unbearable books that stop at the fascination for literary language (including the texts of various literary contests). Although we have to deal with the

(8) It doesn't take too much of an effort to realise that the authors studied in these doctoral theses have been constantly canonised in studies on Basque literature. In this sense, it is understandable that most of these doctoral theses talk about the work of Basque poets, rather than Basque narrative writers. In this case, we are not only referring to tradition, but also to the influence exercised by this poetry and these poets, an influence which has been continuously underlined. If we take a look at these doctoral theses, we would have to begin by recalling the thesis on the Renaissance, among whom are Lizardi (K. Otegi (1991); Lourdes Oraegi (1993)) and Orixe (G. Etxeberria, 1997); or the thesis on Orixe, Lauaxeta and Lizardi (J.K. Igerabide, 1990). We would have to add to these four theses the one on Lauaxeta read in 1985 by Jon Kortazar.

There are also a couple of doctoral theses on the work of Gabriel Aresti (A. Arkotxa (1992); I. Aldekoa (1996)); another on novels about customs and manners, read by A. Toledo in 1989, the thesis defended by S. García Trujillo in 1990... and another two theses on the most translated contemporary Basque author: Bernardo Atxaga. One defended by M. Jose Olaziregi (1997) and the other by U. Apalategi (1998). In addition to this list are the theses on Axular carried out from the rhetoric perspective and defended by P. Salaberri (1997); that written by Jon Casenave on Jean Etchepare (1997); that of Fermin Arkotxa on Chaho (1998); or that of Eneko Bidegain (1999) carried out from a stylistic point of view, to which we would have to add three doctoral theses on children's literature (X. Etxaniz (1996); E. Martin (1998); M. Lopez (2000)).

situation of diglossia being experienced by the Basque language, Basque literature has to break away from the usual romantic subjects: language is not the soul of a people, but then neither is its literature.

2. In order to make the above point into reality, that is, in order to be able to offer the readers of Basque literature the promise of aesthetic pleasure, it is essential to do something about strengthening criticism. Not the criticism denounced by Dylan Thomas that pontificates works and authors as if they were gods, but the criticism that gives a wise and sensible idea of the work. And to do that, we have to overcome the rift existing between the academic critics and the public. We university lecturers should become involved in this task by offering our readings and interpretations in the media and in reviews. And, above all, we should force ourselves to channel the analysis of peripheral systems, that is, force ourselves to overcome the marginality and oblivion suffered by those still subject to translation, literature written by women or children's literature. Let us, once and for all, enrich our literary horizon and open ourselves to books that do not exclusively restrict themselves to the same authors as usual.
3. I would moreover, and by way of a last suggestion, like to make a few remarks on the *translation of works written in Basque*. Several years ago voices were raised among us in favour of the advantages of the translation of works written in Basque into other languages. One example of this is the article "Asaba zaharraren baratza" [The vegetable garden of our forbears] published by Koldo Mitxelena in 1960, or the article published by M. Velez de Mendizabal at the II. World Basque Conference, underlining the advantages of translation with respect to helping Basque writers to go professional. After Bernardo Atxaga's international success, this debate is back again, severe and controversial, after the affirmations of Ibon Sarasola on the so-called "Sinn Fein" complex. In my opinion, we should overcome these complexes and realise the true potential benefits of translation. Works in the Basque language do not require translation in order to obtain a "label of quality" or to obtain approval as the equivalent of our neighbours' literary production, they need it because translation has an enormous amount of importance in minority languages. This means that, as well as making it possible for readers of other languages to enrich the Basque literary horizon, translation guarantees the maintenance of our language. But our leaders have still not realised this, although it would seem that in 2000, subsidies are at last and for the first time being granted for the translation of works in Basque.

I don't know if these paragraphs have helped you to understand the contemporary Basque literary system. I started this talk by recalling the words of a North American author, who was also well known for his friendship with a number of bullfighters: knowing art teaches us to love art. That has been my precise intention with this paper, to help you to get to know and love Basque literature.

In London, on 30-06-2000. Lecture given at the  
1<sup>st</sup> *International Symposium on Basque Cultural Studies*