
EPILOGUE

A view from Basque literature

The historian who mistook his literature for an island

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The encounter between Basque studies and comparative literature studies in the Iberian Peninsula proves to be beneficial and stimulating to both. The two volumes of the present *Comparative history of literatures in the Iberian Peninsula* and the groundbreaking research collaboration on which they are based not only turn out to be fundamental to the understanding of the Iberian Peninsula as a complex and dynamic framework of interliterary relations, they are also expected to serve as an important reference and a milestone for research on Basque literature. The framework created by this project, mapping the literatures of the Iberian Peninsula and their interliterary relations from a comparative viewpoint and challenging the foundations of national literatures by paying attention to phenomena silenced and marginalized by nationally-based historiographies, has generated interesting contributions concerning the literatures in the Basque Country. The varied range and outstanding quality of the papers constitute a promising future for Basque studies. If Basque literature, devoted to its self-definition as a “small” literature and often imagined through the geo-symbol of an island (Domínguez 2010, 109–12), has long remained imperceptible on the Peninsular (and continental) literary map, the studies gathered by this project give an interesting response, allow a greater visibility, and create new perspectives. On the other hand, the inclusion of Basque case studies has also shown to be inspiring for the project itself, questioning the geographical pertinence and challenging other features of its paradigm. In this concluding section, let us first briefly recall the main contributions concerning Basque literature and then, secondly, emphasize their importance and relevance, as well as advance some research topics left out of the present history.

References to Basque literature pop up from the first chapters through the last. In the opening section of the first volume, about discourses on Iberian literary history, both Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza and César Domínguez, two of the general editors, devote part of their chapters to the Basque Country. In “The European horizon of Peninsular literary historiographical discourses,” Fernando Cabo (2010) explores some of the key constituents of Peninsular historiographical discourse on literature from a comparative perspective, considering the European context under which this discourse has developed since its origins in the eighteenth century. At the end of his explorations, he briefly focuses attention on the historiography of Basque literature, emphasizing, among other features, its late appearance, the implementation of a philological bias, the feeling of uniqueness, the difficulty of positioning Basque literature within a geo-literary European framework, the idea of delay with respect to European literature, and, more recently, the insistence on trying to insert Basque into a international scheme. After Fernando Cabo’s short overview, César Domínguez deepens and broadens the analysis of discourses on Basque literary history in one of the sections of his contribution entitled “Historiography and the geo-literary

imaginary. The Iberian Peninsula: Between *Lebensraum* and *espace vécu*.” In this remarkable piece of research, opening up a hitherto unexplored field of study, Domínguez examines the geographical imaginaries that feed the historiographical discourses of the Iberian Peninsula’s literatures. He illustrates “the modalities according to which historians have conceived the Iberian territory” and shows “the implications that those modalities can have for the conceptualization of literatures” (2010, 69). In the section “Literary chronicles from Liliput: ‘One knows what it means to be small’” (102–16), he sheds an interesting light on the meta-geographical imaginary that dominates discourses on Basque literature and, more precisely, on the devotion of Basque literature to its self-definition as a “small” literature. According to Domínguez, Basque historiography made “spatial limitation into a sign of identity for its literature” (109), using a conception of small literature that privileges territorialization, in contrast to the highly deterritorialized use of it in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1986). Furthermore, Basque historiography maximized this territorialization by developing the meta-geography of insularity, an insular isolation that is applied to both the Basque language and its literature. The identification of Basque literature with writing in Euskara is one of the linguistic implications of this (self-)definition of Basque literature through the geo-symbol of an island. Despite the insular image, an interliterary push can be observed in the latest Basque historiography, highlighting the connections of Basque literature with an international context, inscribing it into European interliterary networks, measuring “its power with neighboring continents in an attempt at cosmopolitanism” (Domínguez 2010, 116).

In “Bilbao and the literary system in the Basque Country,” Jon Kortazar, emphasizing the bilingual or diglossic character of the city of Bilbao and its important role in Basque literary production, sets out a short historical overview of the evolution of the literary traditions in Castilian (and in the Bilbaoan dialect) and in Basque, from a comparative and multilingual perspective. He describes the complex relationships between the two main “systems” of Bilbao’s literary space, how they collide with each other and how they enrich each other, as shown by cultural initiatives that have united writers in both languages. In “Basque as a literary language,” Karmele Rotaetxe starts her paper with a short description of the current social situation of the Basque language, which “only exists in a diglossic situation” (2010, 447), and then summarizes the history of Basque as a literary language, dividing it into two parts with the late sixties, which marked a great improvement for the Basque language, as a moment of change. According to Ángel López García (2010, 331), Karmele Rotaetxe’s description of Basque texts exemplifies a “literary disjoint diglossia,” where two languages (influential/influenced) are alternately brought together and moved apart. In the Basque Country, the Spanish language always remains in the background, whereas the practitioners of Euskara, the influenced language, try to move beyond the sphere of Spanish influence.

In the second volume, three chapters are almost entirely devoted to Basque literature. In “Vulnerability and the literary imagination in the Basque context,” Annabel Martín analyzes the works of Julia Otxoa, Bernardo Atxaga, and Luisa Etxenike, three contemporary Basque authors, convinced that the arts “can offer a new vocabulary for social reconciliation in the Basque Country.” Her essay, based on a comparative approach and included in the section dedicated to the study of images and stereotypes of national identity, reflects the cultural diversity and complexity of the Basque context. Far away from the Basque nationalist imaginary and their “heroic identitarian narratives,” these writers, according to Martín, have “best imagined a more humble and less wounded society,” broadened our horizons, and helped rethink identity and its

chimeras. Breaking barriers and building bridges, they help Basque society, dominated so far by “identitarian models lacking in self-awareness and critique,” discover and recognize the other or the “foreigner” in itself.

In “The Atlantic-Iberian Enlightenment: On the imperial-colonial and Morisco-Basque mediations of the Spanish Enlightenment,” Joseba Gabilondo sheds new light on the study of the Spanish Enlightenment. He shows the mistake of adopting an ahistorical, non-imperialist, continental Spanish state as the standpoint from which to analyze the Enlightenment, and problematizes the nationalist idea of a single, homogeneous enlightened Peninsula. Instead of overlooking any extra-Peninsular condition, he reframes the Iberian Peninsula in an imperialist-Atlantic-colonial framework and shows the existence of two Iberian “Enlightenments” that do not share the same geography-history: an imperialist-subaltern Enlightenment, appropriated by the aristocracy under the form of *majismo*, and a colonial-Atlantic Enlightenment, formed from the relations between the Peninsula, mainly the Basque Country, and the American colonies. Gabilondo’s colonial and Atlantic geopolitical perspective does not only allow us to reconsider the canonical approach to the Enlightenment and the nationalist idea of a “(failed) Spanish Enlightenment,” but his relocation of a double extra-Spanish Enlightenment also serves to redefine and rethink the European Enlightenment by highlighting the colonial and imperialist reality that questions Eurocentric discourses on Enlightenment.

In “The recent systemic repositioning of literature in the French Basque Country: Origins of a literary subfield,” Ur Apalategi describes how the Basque literature of Iparralde, in the Northern (or French) Basque Country, shifted from the center to the periphery of the Basque literary system. The low level of industrialization and urban modernization, the increase of French patriotism after World War I, the extra-literary support and aid the Basque language receives in Hegoalde, the Southern (or Spanish) Basque Country, and the absence of institutions to spread *euskara batua* (standardized Basque) among Iparralde’s habitants figure among the causes of the progressive marginalization of the Basque literature of Iparralde. Apalategi’s essay analyzes the different and sometimes opposing strategies that writers of Iparralde, such as Daniel Landart, Itxaro Borda, or Aurelia Arkotxa, have used during the last decades to face their peripheral position. Some of them write exclusively for the readers of Iparralde, others aim to reach all readers in the Basque literary system and gain visibility in the new literary center. Some authors who are originally peripheral assimilate the literary and linguistic characteristics of the literary system’s center or of the center of their own subsystem.

Besides the aforementioned case studies, other researchers and collaborators on the project have paid attention to the Basque Country, often offering valuable and interesting observations. In the first volume, Michael Ugarte (2010) focuses on the Basque writers of the Generation of 1898 — Miguel de Unamuno, Pío Baroja, and Ramiro de Maeztu — when discussing, in an essay titled “Empires waxing and waning: Castile, Spain and American exceptionalism,” the metonymic identification of Castile with Spain. In the introduction to “Multilingualism and literature in the Iberian Peninsula,” Ángel López García (2010) pays special attention to the Basque Country when treating the interlinguistic and intercultural dimension of the Peninsula, just as Roger Wright (2010) takes the Basque Country into account in his essay “Bilingualism and diglossia in Medieval Iberia (350–1350).” In “Ideology and image of Peninsular languages in Spanish literature,” Fernando Romo Feito (2010) offers an analysis of the images of the Peninsular languages, such as Basque, as they appear in the Spanish literary canon. In the section “Dimensions of

orality” which undertakes the comparative study of several manifestations of oral literature in the Iberian Peninsula in different languages, the Basque Country is briefly highlighted in several chapters, such as, for example, José Luis Forneiro’s essay “Linguistic borders and oral transmission” (2010) or José Manuel Pedrosa’s “Iberian traditions of international folktale” (2010). In the last section, “Temporal frames and literary (inter-)systems,” José-Carlos Mainer (2010), in “The dialogue of Iberian literary nationalisms (1900–50),” devotes some pages to the Basque Country and to the Iberianism of Unamuno.

In the second volume, the second section, dedicated to genres, offers some observations about Basque theatre in “The paths of a national idea of theatre in the Iberian Peninsula” by José Camões and Maria João Brilhante; about autobiographical literature in the Spanish Basque Country in “Writing of the self. Iberian diary writing” by Enric Bou and Heike Scharm; and about the essay in Enric Bou and Ángel Otero-Blanco’s “The essay.” In most of these contributions no attention is paid to literary production in the Basque language. However, in “The phenomenon of the bestseller in the Iberia Peninsula,” published in the section on “Popular culture and cultural studies,” David Viñas Piquer focuses on best-sellers and so-called consumer literature written in Euskara, such as *Kutsidazu bidea*, *Ixabel* written by Joxean Sagastizabal, or the works of Jon Arretxe and Jasone Osoro. In the same section, some short references to Basque culture pop also up in María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar’s contribution, “Light changes the placement of things’: Immigration, gender, and resistance in hip-hop music”; in Joan-Elies Adell’s essay “The relationship between popular contemporary music and literature: some examples from the Iberian Peninsula”; and in Concepción Cascajosa Virino’s “Television in Spain and Portugal: From the public monopoly to the new transmedia environment.” In “Feminist, gender and LGBTQ studies in the Iberian Peninsula. A comparative panorama,” María Jesús Fariña Busto and Beatriz Suárez Briones pay attention to the research done in women’s and gender studies at the University of the Basque Country and to Itziar Ziga’s contributions to LGBTQ research.

The studies gathered by this project offer interesting new perspectives to spark new ways of inquiry within Basque studies and lead to a paradigm shift. Although the historiography of Basque literature appeared very late — “there was no true historiographic tradition until the 1960s” (Cabo Aseguinolaza 2010, 47) — most historiographers and scholars did not try to keep aloof from the romantic “national” paradigm of one territory, one nation, one language, one literature, that has dominated the surrounding literary systems since the nineteenth century. Driven by mimetic desire and rivalry, they easily adopted the dominant historical discourses and their national model. Caught in an insular imaginary (Domínguez 2010, 109–12), they placed emphasis almost exclusively on literature written in Euskara, enclosing the Basque cultural production into a homogeneous, monolingual, and national framework, despite awareness of the complexity of the Basque multilingual society raised by other disciplines (just think about all the (socio)linguistic research done in the Basque Country on bilingualism, language contact, diglossia, etc.). Why should the Basque literary system be provided with a literary history based on the model of traditional Spanish or French historical discourses? Why accept a national historiographical discourse based on monolingual ideologies, when the society you’re describing is extremely multilingual (all authors writing in Basque are bilingual)? It would only lead to anachronistic views and turn out to be poorly suited to the study of literary phenomena and relationships in multilingual contexts like the Basque Country. Wouldn’t it be more suitable if heterogeneity was not considered as a handicap or an obstacle, but converted into an asset? If the Basque Country

was regarded as an interesting starting point for the creation of new paradigms and for getting new insights in the problematic ways in which the concepts of “culture” and “literature” are connected to “language,” “territory,” and “nation” in multilingual societies?

Even if, according to Jon Kortazar, “the perspective of current researchers is highly colored by nationalist views” (2010, 222), attempts to overcome the institutionalized illusion of a unified and homogeneous national literary culture and to shift toward another kind of discourse are becoming more and more frequent in recent research. The contributions of the present project, as well as those of the project which preceded it (Abuín González & Tarrío Varela 2004), are just some examples to which others could be added. Jon Kortazar uses comparatist parameters to approach Basque literature in many of his works, convinced as he is that “the only way to speak about Basque literature” is by focusing on “its connection with bigger literary movements” (1998, 25), which remembers Luis (Koldo) Michelena’s statement that “one cannot write a history of Basque literature without paying equal attention to the Spanish and French territories” (1960, 16–17). Joseba Gabilondo, doing research on Basque literature from a post-national perspective, encompassing “all the literature written by the Basques in all their languages” (2013a & 2006), or Ur Apalategi (2000 & 2013), applying a systemic perspective and Bourdieu’s theory of fields to Basque literature, are two other researchers whose commendable efforts are opening up new perspectives, as evidenced by their contributions to the present project. Many other researchers could be added, from Jesús María Lasagabaster whose *Literaturas de los vascos* (Literatures of the Basques, 2002) pays attention to Basque literatures written in Spanish and in Euskara, and Mari José Olaziregi who edited a *Basque literary history* (2013) including chapters on translations and literatures written by Basque writers in other languages, to the new generation of researchers such as Elizabete Manterola Agirrezabalaga (2014) or Manu Lopez Gaseni (2000 & 2005), whose research is getting a better grip on the problem of interliterary contacts by tackling the questions of translation and self-translation, a largely neglected area in Basque studies. Finally, a special mention must be made of the LAIDA research team which, under the direction of Jon Kortazar, has been exploring issues connected to literature and identity from a perspective based on polysystem theory and cultural studies since 2003.

Although Basque literature is a very rich field of research, despite its smallness, it still remains largely unexplored. It is clear that the aforementioned frameworks and research models should guide that research, since they help to understand the Basque Country as a complex network of multilingual and interliterary relationships, where the coexistence of languages and cultures cannot be divided into a simple juxtaposition of monolingual, static, and homogeneous entities. The claim to (re)write literary history focusing on hybridity, interculturality, and heterogeneity, avoiding the homogeneous, static, and nationalistic paradigm in which references to multilingual and intercultural backgrounds are silenced and marginalized, is not new, but it is still worthwhile, and sometimes even necessary, to remind ourselves of it (Lambert 2004, 419). “Arts can offer a new vocabulary for social reconciliation in the Basque Country,” observes Annabel Martín in her contribution to this project; discourses on arts can do this as well. A greater consciousness of the interactions between the different linguistic and cultural groups helps to recognize alterity as inherently within (Levinas 1969), to highlight “foreignness” within the self, and to get a better insight into heterogeneity at different levels, from the crucible of languages and cultures hidden behind apparently monolingual texts and the multilingual and intercultural backgrounds of their authors, to the coexistence and interactions of languages, literatures, and cultures in the cities, in

the regions, and far beyond. Indeed, research on the Basque Country (and so many other societies where multilingualism is and has been more visible) can provide an interesting starting point, an interesting laboratory for the creation of research models for analyzing the intercultural and multilingual complexity of our globalized world, a “polyspheric” world, in which discreet and multipurpose rational games need to teach us to live with a changing multiplicity of perspectives and to do without the chimera of the unique and sovereign point of view (Sloterdijk 2003, 73 & 78). Much of what is happening worldwide in the age of globalization, when “culture is being fractured and ruptured and hybridized everywhere” (Tymoczko 1999, 289), citizenship is becoming post-national and denationalized (Sassen 2002), and the “era of monosphere” — the era of the unique and all embracing circle of unity — has disappeared, has happened before in the more “peripheral” societies. The traditional dominating cultural systems are experiencing what “minority” or “small” cultures have been experiencing for many centuries. They have much to learn from the “peripheral” and multilingual societies. A glance at the Basque Country not only appeals to the construction of a heterogeneous and dynamic self-image, it also invites a critical revision of the homogeneous, monolingual, and static self-image that has dominated identity constructions and literary history for so long in the dominant Western cultures, especially since the rise of nationalism (B. Anderson 1983 & Leerssen 1999). Joseba Gabilondo’s investigations are a clear example. By doing research on Basque literature, among others (Gabilondo 2009), he succeeds in highlighting the “Spanish nationalist excess” and in putting limits to it by proposing a postnational and decolonial approach to Spanish and Iberian Studies (2013b).

To conclude, let’s remember Bernardo Atxaga’s literary metaphor of “Euskal Hiria” (the Basque city). Playing on the assonance between “Euskal Hiria” (the Basque city) and “Euskal Herria” (the Basque Country), the Basque writer “points to the city as the hope for the Basque Country,” considering that “the multiple identities who make up the city provide a model for the Basque Country to follow” (Davies 2012, 65). The comparative approach as proposed by the present project can bring us closer to Atxaga’s utopia. His literary metaphor offers a model that can also be useful for research on Basque literature or, more precisely, on the multiple literatures that make up the so-called Basque city, a city to be considered, not as a point of a national territory, but as a node of an interurban network (Domínguez 2007a, 182), or even as a node of a cross-border global network, a “global city” (Sassen 1991). So, instead of (mis)taking the Basque Country for an island, it would perhaps be more stimulating and more suitable if we (mis)take it for a city.



Volume 2 of *A Comparative History of Literatures in the Iberian Peninsula* brings to an end this collective work that aims at surveying the network of interliterary relations in the Iberian Peninsula. No attempt at such a comparative history of literatures in the Iberian Peninsula has been made until now. In this volume, the focus is placed on images (Section 1), genres (Section 2), forms of mediation (Section 3), and cultural studies and literary repertoires (Section 4). To these four sections an epilogue is added, in which specialists in literatures in the Iberian Peninsula, as well as in the (sub)disciplines of comparative history and comparative literary history, search for links between Volumes 1 and 2 from the point of view of general contributions to the field of Iberian comparative studies, and assess the entire project that now reaches completion with contributions from almost one hundred scholars.

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