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## The Routledge Companion to Iberian Studies

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### Fermented Memory

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# Literature and visual culture



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## FERMENTED MEMORY

The intemperance of history in the narrative of  
Ramón Saizarbitoria*Joan Ramon Resina*

When José Saramago received the Nobel Prize, there was no unanimity among the critics. Some considered Antonio Lobo Antunes a superior writer, and his name had in fact circulated in connection with the Nobel. Portugal is too small and too lightweight politically to reasonably expect two Nobel awards in one generation. This geopolitical limitation, wherever it exists, engenders similar dichotomies. Fortunately, the canon's ongoing readjustment makes the omission from an award, even the Nobel, of no consequence for an author's posterity. The history of contemporary literature is stock-full of authors who were never distinguished by the Swedish Academy, while the annals of the Nobel teem with names that no longer command the esteem they once did.

If I mention this dichotomy in Portuguese literature rather than the classic one between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, it is because such dualisms arise more frequently in literatures considered "minor." The alternative "Tolstoy or Dostoevsky," the title of a renowned work by George Steiner, concerns a choice between generic modalities of writing (epic versus drama) rather than a dispute about literary eminence. Had the Nobel Prize existed in the nineteenth century, a fair number of Russian authors could have been candidates. A restrictive list would have included Chekhov, Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, and Herzen. On the contrary, the dichotomy I have in mind tends to polarize the options to the exclusion of others and is often the mark of subaltern literatures, where international success confers inordinate symbolic capital on a single author. If the Swedish Academy had been inclined to award the Nobel Prize to one Czech novelist of the last century (Jaroslav Seifert received it for poetry in 1948), would it have favored Milan Kundera or Bohumil Hrabal? It is, of course, a moot question. For decades there has been speculation on who the long overdue Catalan Nobel laureate for literature will be. Some years ago the names in circulation were Baltasar Porcel and Miquel Martí i Pol, but both died without the Swedish Academy recognizing their work; Salvador Espriu and Josep Vicenç Foix received only unsuccessful nominations before their own deaths. In Catalonia everyone knows that if the Nobel committee does one day recognize Catalan literature, there will be room for one prize only. This awareness automatically changes the question of relative merit to one of absolute preeminence. This is not the case in "normalized" literatures. In the French case, the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Albert Camus in 1957 did not imply a judgment on the superiority of Camus over the author that dominated the literary scene at the time. Jean-Paul Sartre would also receive the award seven years later. And priority does not entail precedence.

Temporal anticipation could not, in this instance, be construed as meritorious advantage. Let us recall that Sartre's major literary work, *Nausea*, was published in 1938.

I have begun with this reflection because it seems to me that, even without intervention from the Nobel committee appearing imminent, the representational dilemma typical of a small-size literature such as the Basque weighs on the estimation of Bernardo Atxaga and Ramón Saizarbitoria. Given that literary values are subject to fluctuations and often respond to extrinsic factors, one might ask what lies behind the tendency to consider Atxaga the most exportable of Basque writers, as is clearly reflected in the number of translations, reviews, awards, and invitations that he and his works have received, and even in the endowment of university chairs with his name. Might this swift differentiation of one single voice be the effect of a circular logic? It surely does seem that, in the haste to produce one visible "national author," Atxaga has been invested with the role played by Camões, Cervantes, and Lull in other Iberian literatures. But unlike these authors, whose names are seamlessly embedded in a centuries-old tradition, the future status of a modern classic is unpredictable and remains reversible for quite some time. For the time being, though, it can be affirmed that, while those earlier classics could not foresee their posthumous sovereignty in their respective languages, Atxaga enjoys in life his anticipated posterity through his official crowning as the writer of reference in Euskera. I would hazard that, more than market factors traceable to the relative scarcity of competition in a literature with a small demographic base, what best reveals the willful nature of this investiture is the synchrony between the institution of Basque literature as a national literature and the consecration of an author to represent it. Although undeniably flattering to Atxaga and stimulating for the younger authors who aspire to emulate his success, the fact is that boosting one single voice over the polyphony needed to build a literature throws as much shadow as light over the field of Basque letters. At the very least it presents the drawback of subduing Saizarbitoria's work and literary personality.

Saizarbitoria himself has talked about the advantages that a small-footprint literature like the Basque can obtain in drawing from its own resources rather than measuring itself by inapplicable standards. "We often put aside our resources because they are not in themselves those of a normal people or culture, and it seems that this happens to us because we want to be as normalized as the others. One does not become big by walking on tiptoe" (Etxeberria 2002, 157). These are wise words, and despite the discretion with which Saizarbitoria refers to Atxaga at all times during the interview, they apply to this writer. There was a moment when Atxaga started tiptoeing, mistaking globalization with stature. I do not criticize the ambition. There is nothing wrong with aspiring to become the García Márquez of Basque literature. Yet one must be clear that while the Colombian Nobel Prize recipient was able to launch Macondo onto the global scene by relying on an imaginative transcription of Colombia, Atxaga appears to believe that one becomes a global writer by writing for the world.

When Hasier Etxeberria, underscoring the difference between the two writers – "two ways of looking at literature: yours, more social, and Atxaga's, more literary" – suggests that Saizarbitoria's joining the journal *Ustela* prompted Atxaga to leave (2002, 127), Saizarbitoria does not dispute that distribution of roles, but shuns the implication of a clash between personalities. The interviewer insists: "There were also different writing styles and different literary interests." Saizarbitoria agrees: "Yes, that is also true. I had nothing to do in that other style. Borges, whom they so much appreciated, never interested me, and the reason is not that he sent us, Basques, to tend the cows" (Etxeberria 2002, 127). Etxeberria drives the point home: "Perhaps you preferred a literature with a social foundation to mere literary play." The reply: "It is possible. I lived in a different world. It seems that in the third issue of *Ustela* we departed

from Atxaga's objectives; and something similar happened with the later *Oh! Euzkadi*" (Etxeberria 2002, 128).

Although the distinction between social literature and literary literature is perplexing, especially in relation to an author who had absorbed the lessons of the *nouveau roman*, it seems possible to draw a distinction between the fictional world of *Obabakoak*, which borders on magical realism, and Saizarbitoria's narrative, which is quite explicitly centered on memory. "The writer – he asserts – works with memory and with feelings. Those are his raw materials" (Etxeberria 2002, 166). I suggest that by "memory" Saizarbitoria understands a core of objectivity that resists the writer and which, as a result, allows him to build a solid work. Thus understood, memory is for him what the marble blocks were for Michelangelo: an exterior resistance in which he excavated his idea. Similarly, Saizarbitoria anchors imagination in memory, forcing experience to gravitate toward those anchor points: "The novel is imagination, and imagination is memory. As someone said, imagination is fermented memory" (Etxeberria 2002, 150).

I would like to dwell on this phrase and explore its implications for the narrative technique employed in three of his works. But first a common misconception requires attention. Although the author embeds terrorism in his plots as a reality that has been present in Basque society, this aspect does not justify reducing his work to political commentary. There could be no objection if those who perform such extrapolations acknowledged the arbitrariness of allowing a contextual element to overshadow the aesthetic object and rise up to the level of narrative truth. Such critics take to heart Hasier Etxeberria's categorical distinction between "social literature" and "literary literature," expelling Saizarbitoria from the latter. The error stems from the confusion between the verbal nature of theoretical constructs and the deductive mechanism employed to set up a misleading correspondence between the verbal play and the complexity of reality. On the level of self-awareness, the novel outpaces theory by presenting every presumption of such correspondence within the frame of fiction. As a consequence of this novelistic self-awareness, critical efforts to derive an objective truth about social or political reality directly from a work of fiction fall into a confusion of categories. A valid critique will be aware of the mediate character of "the reality effect" in fictional works and will try to elucidate how fiction is constructed with thematic building blocks that include portions of reality without reproducing its infinite complexity.

If imagination is fermented memory, then memory and its fermentation are the necessary objects of narrative. Saizarbitoria understands that literary images rely on a previous signification, but unlike deconstructionists, meaning for him is not permanently deferred but is ultimately supported by the objective world. Unless he is a Dadaist, the writer does not interpret the linguistic sign arbitrarily, does not fully surrender to the game of literariness, but codifies the signs of experience in the process of turning it into memory. This is the reason that in *Hamaika Pauso (The Countless Steps)* (1995), the composition of a dictionary proves absurd and even impossible, as the writing of Iñaki Abaitua gradually turns into the story of Daniel Zabalegi, and this into the novel in which the reader contemplates the osmosis between a text based on a closed system of retro feeding signs (the dictionary) and the novel's open system of countless steps. Countless not insofar as the referent is inexhaustible, but because it is always possible to begin all over again from any of the narrated moments by shifting the perspective. This is why, in a moment of unguarded sincerity that is wrongly interpreted as a joke, Abaitua proposes replacing the dictionary's alphabetical order with a less arbitrary order based on the enticement of what Heidegger calls "worldhood" and defines as a context of assignations (*Being and Time* 1962, 121).

But to modify the perspective, be it ever so slightly, implies altering the context in which the object is perceived. This context is the world, and first of all the world encountered as a system of uses: the city, the streets and squares with names that can be ascertained on a map, the landmarks and features of the landscape, the stores and cider bars where the old *gudaris* (Basque soldiers) meet. All of this comes together in a bundle of familiar relationships that have grown inextricable from the objects trapped in their orbit. The world that I deem external supports my memory while being integral to it. Without anchors in time and space, I cannot secure any memory. To retain anything in my memory, I need coordinates that fix the recollection of something in particular. This outside world that orients my perspective is the condition of possibility of my experience. I am not referring to the famous *lieux de mémoire*, which transpose the transcendental conditions of experience to the theory of the social construction of memory. I am referring to the fact that consciousness, which is not an object in the world, stands nonetheless in a relation of immediacy to it through a body that can only be abolished at the cost of abolishing thought at the same time. If the laws of perception delude us, for instance when we see as broken a stick that is submerged in water, we cannot alter that perception no matter how often we repeat the experience. I can only correct my vision intellectually by relying on my knowledge of the refraction of light. I realize that I suffer an illusion, but I cannot modify what my pupil registers by changing the stick or the puddle. The illusion caused by the deflection of the light rays when they pass through a liquid medium is simply invincible on the physiological plane.

Saizarbitoria approaches memory in a similar fashion. To remember is to get one's bearings from the standpoint of experience. But upon entering a certain environment, the mnemonic rays take on a life of their own and remembering loses every objective other than filling up empty time and space. By turning itself into an object, memory produces an illusion of reality, a semblance of the ontological presence of what it recalls. The protagonist of *Bihotz bi. Gerrako kronikak* (*Love and War*) (1996) can set Samuel's memory in motion by simply mentioning a key phrase, such as "orduana Carrasco hil egin zuten" [then they killed Carrasco] (36). These few words trigger Samuel's memory as surely as the stick bends upon entering the puddle:

Samuelek lehen aldia izan balitz bezala kontatzen zuen, eta gainerako guztiak errespetuz entzuten zioten, pentsatu ere egin gabe "pasarte hori honezkero mila aldiz entzun diagu" edo antzekorik esatea, bai baikenekien ez zuela kontagai zuena jakinarazteko asmoz kontatzen, baizik eta, pertsonarik isilenak ere, noizbehinka, barrena hustu beharra izaten duelako [Samuel told it as if it were the first time, and the others listened respectfully, without even occurring to them to say: 'We have heard this story at least one thousand times' or something like that. Because we knew that, if he told it, it was not because he wanted to make known what he was saying, but because even the quietest people need now and then to let out what they have inside].

(*Bihotz bi. Gerrako kronikak* 1996, 36)

What Samuel had inside is perfectly familiar to his small circle of friends but, as time passes and the distance grows between his immediate audience and the hypothetical addressee of the story, Samuel's intimacy becomes spectral and ceases to move anyone. Yet it is precisely the ability to move (to be refracted in the consciousness of others) that endows memory with consistency. Listening to Samuel, the narrator muses: "Pasadizoa kontatzen zuen bakoitzean, neronek ere garrasi haiek entzun nitzakeela iruditzen zitzaidan" [Every time he recounted that

event, it seemed to me that even I could hear those cries] (*Bihotz bi. Gerrako kronikak* 1996, 37). Which proves, if proof be needed, that emotion creates its object.

Objectified through sheer repetition, remembrances become conventional. What memory gains in truth, it loses in authenticity. “Nik, gerraz hitz egingo zutenez,” reflects the narrator, “hiztegi entziklopedikoetan ez datozen historiak kontatzen zirela nahi nuen” [Since they were going to talk about war, I would have preferred that their stories be different from those in encyclopedias] (*Bihotz bi. Gerrako kronikak* 1996, 29–30). There is irony in the fact that the narrator, who makes a living by peddling encyclopedias, is convinced that Knowledge and Reason (capitalized in his mind) are the highest qualities, and remains of this opinion even after he murders his wife for attempting to please him sexually ((*Bihotz bi. Gerrako kronikak* 1996, 7). With his encyclopedic optimism and his ability to memorize numerous definitions, this character is a variant – or a refraction – of Iñaki Abaitua, the creator of definitions for a dictionary in *Hamaika pauso*. But whereas Abaitua finally realizes the absurdity of reducing experience to a definition, the narrator of *Love and War* believes that the two may coincide. Even so, he acknowledges that emotion is inseparable from the refraction of the past in individual memory, whereas restricting subjectivity by means of what one has learned impoverishes the narration:

Berez, kontalariak, kontakizun duen historia bizi izandako norbaiten aurrean aritzen diren batez ere, kontaketa objektiboa egiteko joera izaten baitu; historialari bihurtu nahi duela esango genuke, kontalari papera utzita [Normally, the narrator, especially in the presence of someone who witnessed the situation he is narrating, feels the need to present an objective account. One could say that he renounces his role as narrator, that is, that he desists from contributing subjective nuances and tries to assume the historian’s function].

(*Bihotz bi. Gerrako kronikak* 1996, 24)

Thus, Samuel and his friends, convinced that they are remembering their war experiences, talk in fact about altitudes and coordinates, draw the lines of trenches with the help of the silverware and show the movements of troops shifting the glasses around the table. “Hala eta guztiz ere,” the narrator observes, “batzuetan, esaten zuten gauza interesgarriak, gainerakoak artean heldu gabe zeudelako, edo alde eginak zirelako jada; alegia, haietako batekin bakarka geratuz gero, egiten zituzten bestelako aitorpenak ere” [In any case, sometimes they actually said interesting things, either because the others had not arrived yet, or because they had already left. In other words, if you were alone with one of them, they used to make other kinds of confessions] (*Bihotz bi. Gerrako kronikak* 1996, 31). Perhaps the things they dared to say in the absence of witnesses were more interesting than those they told to the group. But the problem with these monolog confessions is that they elude the proof of the community. Being a longitudinal cross-section in the collective memory, the personal narration cannot aspire to the status of truth in the absence of other testimony. Truthfulness is not an attribute intrinsic to an assertion, but a quality furnished by the distinction between what the assertion derives from the object and what the narrator brings to it. No matter how interesting they may be, individual testimonies by themselves do not suffice to establish a historical memory. Only the intersubjective creation of memory, which is after all subject to conventions, can convert the emotion to knowledge and fill the volumes of encyclopedias and history books. That is why the narrator asserts that the bars of Euskadi teem with old drunkards searching for victims on whom to foist a monolog about the war, which would fill at most “Lau folioen espazioa eskatuko



luke, laurogei lerro, mila hitz baino gutxiago” [the space of four pages, less than eighty lines, about one thousand words] (*Bihotz bi. Gerrako kronikak* 1996, 23). There is therefore an idiosyncrasy of memory, and the narrator recognizes its charm:

Nik, ordea, ez dut erabat galdu umeek ohi duten gustua, historia bera behin eta beriz entzuteko. Ez dakit zergatik, beharbada ez naizelako erabat heldua, kontua da kontakizun baten emanaldi desberdinen arteko xehetasun eta ñabardurak atzematea atsegin dudala, askotan; kontaketa, historia bera baino nahiago, esan nahi dut [For whatever reason, I have not lost completely that childish fondness for listening to the same story again and again. I don't know why, perhaps because I have not completely matured, the fact is that, often, I like to appreciate the details and nuances of different versions of the same story; that is, I prefer narration, the plot, to the tale itself].

(*Bihotz bi. Gerrako kronikak* 1996, 23)

In this novel Saizarbitoria retains the metanarrative concern of his previous work, but what gives impetus to the story is the activation of memory through the accumulation of new details (Olaziregi 2008, 393).

The narrator of *Love and War* exerts his memory according to the needs of the plot, which progresses through trial and iterations, adapting remembrance to the verisimilitude of conventional fiction. Trying to reconstruct the dialogue in which his wife confessed her infidelity, he hesitates about the sequence of the exchange:

Ez dirudi oso sinesgarria; “Ez iezadazu historia hondatu” horrek, bereziki. Oso naturala ez behintzat, batez ere nik “ez nazazu utzi” esan ondoren kokatua. [. . .] Hasierak, ordea, ez du dudarik, “banoa” esaten dit, nik ea zer duen galdetutakoan. Ziur da hori. [. . .] “Ez nazazu abandonatu” – edo “ez nazazu utzi,” eta gerritik besarkatzen dut. Sinesgarriagoa dirudi [It does not seem very credible; especially that “do not spoil the story.” At least not very natural, especially after my saying “do not leave me.” [. . .] Regarding the beginning, however, there is no doubt; she says “I am leaving” when I ask her what’s the problem with her. That much is certain. [. . .] “Do not leave me” – or “do not abandon me,” and I put my arm around her waist. It looks more plausible].

(*Bihotz bi. Gerrako kronikak* 1996:172–173)

Reflecting on the story’s effect on memory and the impossibility of an access to the past free from narrative distortion is Saizarbitoria’s main contribution to Basque literature and – through his concept of imagination as fermented memory – to a general theory of fiction. His interest in the fermenting of memory transpires in the repetition of situations around which the author builds the variations of his novels. There is always an inaccessible experience around which discourses are endlessly generated in a hopeless effort to reconstruct it. David Laraway turns to Lacanian psychoanalysis by way of Žižek to interpret the material memory in the tale about Sabino Arana’s exhumation in the collection *Gorde Nazazu Lurpean*. He understands the relic as “an emblem of a particular structural lack within the discourse of Basque nationalism itself” (Laraway 2007, 365). This assertion is not necessarily false, to the extent that the Lacanian structural lack underlies every symbolic system, but a less politicized reading may better agree with Saizarbitoria’s concern with the incommensurability between logos and experience in memory processes. I do not deny the author’s political position. Regarding the story of the exhumation, Saizarbitoria has declared that he wished to betray the legacy

of Basque nationalism. And the nationalist Spanish press was quick to seize upon that statement (Echeverría 2002). But perhaps not enough attention has been paid to his explanation about the inordinate weight of the ideological legacy in Basque nationalism, a legacy whose constraints are proportional to the countervailing Spanish nationalism that opposes it. Aware of the dangers of running away from the dictates of one ideology only to sacrifice one's critical autonomy to the opposite ideology, Saizarbitoria distances himself from former Basque militants converted to militant Spanish nationalism and claims for himself a sentimental space commensurable with the individual. "I do not wish the fatherland to make me unhappy, nor do I want to shoulder patriotic tasks that are not within reach of my strength" (Echeverría 2002). All in all, he urges us to regain a sense of balance between experience, which in this instance happens to be historical, and its sentimental or dogmatic extensions in time.

In his work, historical experience is generally associated with the Spanish Civil War and its projection on the present (a projection of which ETA is only one consequence). But to consider this war the only cause of the dislocation of the present may be a generational delusion, a convention accepted by the friends who gather in a cider bar every evening. The name of this establishment, "Hunger," is surely meaningful. As a space of projection or a sounding board for the collective memory, "Hunger" announces the impossibility of satisfying the essential lack. Ruminating on the past, going over the same commonplaces and familiar stories time and again does not satisfy. Yet emptiness at the core of life compels the defeated to retrace the same episodes over and over in monotonous circles, in the same way that Claudia can gobble endless servings of eggs fried with chorizo. Violence lurks in the labyrinth of words, fascinating by its invisible presence. It is a primary experience without dates or concrete memories but capable of being transmitted from grandparents to grandchildren, like the mole on Violet's throat, at once the trace of a forgotten story and the omen of a death whose anticipated terror shapes life. It may be due to the primordial, pre-logical character of violence that *Love and War* begins with its assertion. From this point of view Flora's murder would be a variation of the plot against the background of the fable's monotony, which is still the indelible pressure of a war story on the collective memory.

The group of veterans who are constantly weaving the web of memory reappears in the collection of stories *Gorde nazazu lurpean (Keep me under the ground)* (2000). In this book "Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua" [The Old Gudari's Lost War] stands out for its reflection on memory's fermentation. War is at once the source of remembrance and a metaphor for the effort to incorporate experience into social memory. In face of this effort, the witness's impotence to recount his knowledge amounts to losing the war a second time. As the victims of atrocities often assert, the *gudari* only wants to tell his story, to establish its truth. But his true desire is to recover his amputated leg, to restore his body's integrity, to heal his wound, to undo his lack, to work out his trauma. But who wishes to look at a festering wound that has reopened after years and oozes what Saizarbitoria calls "fermented memory"? Only the military authority, and then pro-forma, to certify the *gudari*'s status as one of the vanquished in a humiliating examination. In despair, the *gudari* hires a prostitute not to engage in sex but to turn her into a paid *voyeuse* of his wound.

The fermentation of memory centers the *gudari*'s narrative. His wound starts oozing many years after the amputation. The alleged cause is high blood sugar, but oddly the scar reopens when he is forced to show his stump to a military medical tribunal. And this event is contemporary with the first post-Franco Prime Minister, Adolfo Suárez's proclamation: "*Hay que restañar las heridas de la guerra*" [We must heal the wounds of the war] ("Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua" 2000, 27). It was paradoxically around this time, when the Francoists and the opposition tacitly subscribed to a pact on forgetting, that a court of victors had to decide on the

extent and validity of the memory of the vanquished. After four decades of enforced silence, the head of the government wanted wounds to heal which no one had thought it necessary to treat. Built into his exhortation to forget was, however, the allusion to a memory that had been not so much superseded as amputated.

The basic problem of historical memory does not lie in the *what* but in the *how*, in the way the past is narrated. The old *gudari* is constrained to establish through notarization, that is, through impersonal protocol, something that he knows from personal experience. His dilemma is *how* to prove, that is, how to objectify what he has lived in the flesh. The government demands that he bring witnesses. And then his problems begin. The *gudari* decides to take Eguía and Elorza along, “Elorzaz aparte ez zegoelako beste inor batailoikorik” [because, other than Elorza, nobody from his battalion remains alive] (“Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua” 2000, 13), and although Eguía had fought in a different unit, he was stationed only a couple of miles away from where the events took place. Besides, they were instructing Eguía on the details about the battalion, and by dint of listening to the story in the Paco Bueno – the name of the cider bar in this narration – they all knew it by heart (“Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua” 2000, 13). There is also Amiano, who tells the story best, although he was not a direct witness. But he is dying and cannot appear before the notary public. In the end, the witnesses are superfluous; the notary only asks the *gudari* for the facts and checks his attempt to describe them in Balzacian detail by prompting him repeatedly to “go to the point,” that is to gravitate to the fable, leaving aside the subtleties of plot. At the limit, the ideal narrative would correspond to a generic formula free from individualizing circumstances: the vision of the broken stick, here the amputated leg, corrected by the political equivalent of the refraction of light. But the *gudari* knows that the plot determines the story’s value:

Aditzera ematen ez diren arte ideia batzuk ez baitira zehatz taxutzen, eta, era berean, buru barruan itzulika interesgarriak diruditen pentsakizunek, sarritan, hitz bihurtu bezain pronto erakutsi ohi dutelako beren zentzugarriaren egia [he knew that ideas do not take shape until they’re expressed and that they often seem interesting while we’re thinking them, and yet reveal themselves stupid as soon as we put them into words].

(“Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua” 2000, 33)

Naturally, we can ask what ideas are and whether they exist before they are embodied in language. And if they do, whether they enjoy immediate knowledge of things. Such immediacy, if it exists, would be lost as soon as ideas come under the semantic and grammatical rigor of the phrase. This theory of expression is essentially Platonic, ideas (which in Plato are the object of contemplation) playing here the part of paradise lost when the soul is reborn in the reflected world of the copy. Plato’s reincarnation theory is a theory of memory in disguise, a myth concocted to support the belief in innate ideas, that is, to provide a metaphysical foundation for the human capacity for deductive reasoning or, in Kantian terms, for a priori synthetic judgments. Unaware of the philosophical implications of his quandary, the *gudari* confronts the question of the existence of memory that is independent of analytical propositions, that is, in Kantian language, propositions that are conceptually determined. He attempts to overcome the constraints of language logic by condensing truth in a discourse that tends to simultaneity and hence to silence:

Askotan gertatzen zizaion zerbait kontatu beharra zuenean nondik hasi ezin asmatzea. Beti, egia esan; eta gehiago, entzulea aspertu nahi ez zuelako-edo, gauzak

ahalik eta lasterren kontatzera behartuta sentitzen zenean [He often did not know where to begin a story. To be honest, it happened almost always; above all when, trying not to bore his interlocutor, he felt compelled to tell it all as fast as possible].

(“Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua” 2000, 33)

How can one preserve truth in its purity, in the sense of pure intuition, when language has the power of verisimilitude? Faced with this problem, the *gudari* opts for withholding those facts that do not fit into the official discourse of memory; facts such as his having leaned out of the trench just before the explosion that tore his leg. He suppresses certain particulars in order not to compromise the pension he hopes to obtain or to avoid producing an effect that would run counter to his purpose at the moment, although “Baina hori zen egia, eta ongi asko zeukan gogoan” [it was the truth and he would never be able to get it out of his head] (“Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua” 2000, 38). He must, therefore, keep to discursive formulas and the parameters of plausibility in order to make sense. “Lasaitasuna behar zen zerbait kontatzeko; edonondik hasteko libertatea gero, kontakizuna puntu batean utzi, eta, behar izanez gero, beste bati ekiteko” [To tell anything one needed calm and the freedom to begin the story just about anywhere; to be able to break the narrative thread at any point and, if necessary, to pick it up elsewhere] (“Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua” 2000, 33). Discourse is oriented by the speech act, which organizes its elements to inspire an interest which the *gudari* seeks by “entzulea aspertu nahi ez zuelako-edo” [trying not to bore his interlocutor] (“Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua” 2000, 33). The plot – as distinguished from the fable – is responsible for the pragmatic organization of discourse. Telling has an implicit purpose, and the audience determines the form of the narrative by affecting which materials will go into the composition and which will be excluded:

Horregatik, ideia irristakor haiek zehazki taxutzeko orduan berehala konturatzen zen, ahoskatu barik, bere golkorako esan orduko, zentzurik gabeko hitzak zirela; gehienez ere Amiano, Elorza eta besteak samintzeko baino balio ez zutenak [The truth is that he spent hours trying to give shape to those elusive ideas that he hardly ever managed to share, because he realized, as soon as he formulated them, just by saying them to himself, that they lacked sense; that they only served to hurt Amiano, Elorza, and the rest of his friends].

(“Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua” 2000, 43)

In reality the important distinction is not between ideas formulated in the recesses of consciousness and ideas expressed through the voice (or the alphabet) in a specific social context. The decisive distinction is between pre-verbal experience (the truth that “he would never be able to get out of his head”) and memory, understood as the symbolic organization of experience within a temporal perspective; in other words, a symbolic arrangement that *means* for the point of view sustained by the present state of signification.

The *gudari*'s drama stems from his need to prove that he was maimed in the war. But this proof is unobtainable. To fully account for his suffering, he would have to communicate the experience, and experience of the past is off limits because it has been displaced by memory. And memory is unreliable. Like the professor from the great Lagado academy, who proposed to abolish words and replace them with things, the *gudari* gives up on telling his story and goes in search of the only irrefutable witness, the lost limb. Strictly speaking, recovering his leg is the only way to restore his integrity (filling in the lack at the core of nationalism, as a Lacanian reading of the story would have it) and the sole conclusive proof of his existence as

a *gudari*. But since retrieving the past is impossible, he will die in the attempt. The incongruity between memory and existence makes of the places of memory not points of access to the past but spaces for the insertion of particular mythologies. At the crossroads where he asks the cab driver to stop near the old front line, the *gudari* discovers a monolith with the following inscription in Basque and Spanish: “Euzkadi’k emen geldia-azoeban / etsaiaren jazarraldia 1936–10–4, 1937–4–20 ta 23” [Here Euzkadi halted the invader 4–10–1936, 20 and 23–4–1937] (“Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua” 2000, 45).

This is a Basque version of the Spanish *no pasarán*, transferred from the mythology of the left to that of nationalism. But the fixing of the historical flow on specific dates distorts the historical truth, and the uselessness of the sign’s deictic purpose (on the date the monolith was inaugurated it no longer signaled the presence of a border) calls attention to the freezing of Basque nationalism’s historical memory at the instant immediately before its constitutive trauma: the bombing of Guernica three days after the presumed victory celebrated in the monolith. The fictional transcription of this freezing of the Basque historical memory is the *gudari*’s watch, permanently stopped at four thirty, the hour when Guernica’s bombing began. The airplanes flying over the area occupied by the *gudari*’s unit are the Junker and Heinkel that carried out the action in Guernica. And although this action took place six days after the facts related by the *gudari*, the incongruence may be due to his memory’s imprecision: “Ez zekien memoriaren joera ote zen data zehatzik gabeko oroitzapen asko egun hartan finkatzekoa” [He did not know if grouping many memories without precise dates in the same day was due to faulty memory] (“Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua” 2000, 49). Just as imagination projects the emotions onto the outer world, when violence has been suffered the memory tends to concentrate on a traumatic instant. From this moment on the war is no longer a chain of events causally linked to each other, but a spiritual black hole where impressions melt into memories before disappearing forever:

—Gerrako abenturak gogoratzeraz, orduan – esan zuen txoferrak.

[—So, on your way to remember the adventures of the war – said the driver.]

“Gerra gogoratzeraz ez, ezin baitut burutik kendu” esatea bururatu zitzaion, baina ez zuen esan. (“Gudari zaharraren gerra galdua” 2000, 41) [He was tempted to reply “Not to remember the war, because I can’t get it out of my head,” but he kept quiet].

It is not by chance that the recounting of the facts, blocked by the notarial interrogation, flows during the taxi ride to Mount Ascensio. The journey in space helps temporalize memory, ordering things in a sequence equivalent to the stringing of words in the tale. When the *gudari* feels that his story is stalling because of the need to tell one thing at a time, he is in fact feeling the resistance of time to the pain accumulated in one single instant. The traumatic moment encapsulates his entire life and, for reasons that remain inscrutable, is the only time available on his watch. Although he tries to wind up the watch, it is of no avail. He cannot historicize the fixed idea that fills his consciousness. If time existed objectively – and the stopped watch suggests it does not – it might ease the pain by drawing it out over an infinity of moments. The timelessness of trauma prevents him from telling it all at once.

Telling all at once is what the protagonist of *Love and War* attempts by beginning his narration with a phrase that contains the only important fact in the story. This is so emphatically the case that the rest is an overgrown triteness, as if the novel’s signifying surface were a balloon and the words so much hot air helping it take off.

The narrator of *Hamaika pauso* also reveals the end at the beginning, but he does so in full awareness of the arbitrariness of the narrative order:

Ordu gutxi barru bistaz hartzen duen eremuko punturen batean hilko dela dakienean jada: hortik has daiteke kontakizuna, edo lehenagotik, lehenagotik baitzekien alboan, badiara ematen duen etxean, leiho bat aukeratuko zuela—Juliaren salakoa—bere azken begiradarentzat euskarri [When he already knows that he's going to die in a few hours at some point in the panorama that his eyes encompass: that could be the beginning of the story. Or earlier, because long before that moment he knew that he would choose a window—the one in Julia's living room—there, in the house looking on the bay, as support for his last gaze].

(*Hamaika pauso* 1995, 7)

In effect, if death is the conclusion of everything that can be narrated, it is also the perspective that makes it possible to link up the facts leading to that horizon. To call attention to his character's existential boundary, not because of an absurd aestheticism (Izurieta 2004, 83), Saizarbitoria introduces the window right away as the frame and support for the narrative perspective. Death is the foundation of every story, not just because the threat of extinction stimulates consciousness, but because, as a definitive and irrefutable limit, it inaugurates all life possibilities by turning every action into a genuine choice. Stories are not only retrospective but retroactive as well. The anticipated interruption of the future transforms it into a field of limited possibilities, forcing consciousness to select and order the experiences that become significant in light of the unexpected:

Momentu orok du lehenago bat eta, gauzak hasieratik kontatzeko ahalegina alferrikakoa denez, zilegi da historiari edozein pasartetatik ekitea. Eta amaieratik hobe. Amaierak bai, zehatzak baitira, erabatekoak askotan [Every moment has a previous one and, since it is useless to try to tell things from the beginning, the story can start anywhere. Better by the end, since endings, at least, are concrete, often definitive].

(*Hamaika pauso* 1995, 7)

Concreteness and finality are aspects of the same intuition. If only the ending is concrete, then everything coming before is tentative or reversible, and time is abolished. Time was often ignored in the classic novel, a genre in which diachrony is the equivalent of universal gravitation in Newtonian physics. In a classic story, time is a factor of extension: first comes one thing, which makes room for another, and so on with a rhythm that replicates the movement of the clock and the turning of pages in the calendar. That very linearity precluded time from being perceived. That is why Bergson's encounter with duration led to the discovery of the time "lost" in the novel, of time as the novel's forgotten protagonist. Saizarbitoria's narrative technique has been compared to play (Kortazar 2005) or with an aesthetic fetishism at the service of the ideology of modernism, postmodernism, and capitalism (Izurieta 2004, 84). Critics have missed the rigorous logic with which he incorporates a phenomenological intuition of time and avoids treating this essential component of narrative as an abstraction. If we take seriously the notion that Saizarbitoria's formal efforts evince technical innovation, then we have to consider his work in relation to the philosophical thought that was responsible for the displacement of abstract time through lived time in the contemporary novel. Bergson is the philosopher who most inspired the modernist experimenting with heterogeneous temporalities, circularity, and

fragmentation of the narrative consciousness. I will not attempt to summarize his reflections on time and memory. Suffice it to say that Saizarbitoria's formal experimentation is a distant echo of the rigor with which Bergson replaced the abstract concepts of classical philosophy with others better adapted to the appearance of things. This revolution in the priorities elicited by the strict description of the movement of consciousness finds correspondence in the Basque novelist's handling of his materials.

Bergson asserted that a true philosopher writes one single work in the course of his life. Genuine philosophy is a complex effort to express something infinitely simple, so simple in fact that the philosopher never succeeds in expressing it. The magnitude of the challenge is what keeps him speaking or writing all his life. "All the complexity of his doctrine, which would go to infinity, is nothing but the incommensurability between his simple intuition and the means of expression at his disposal" (Bergson 1934, 137). The simplicity of the intuition that captures the total sense of life is the only referent on which the man who is about to die fixes his attention. Knowing that his death is near, Iñaki Abaitua, the protagonist of *Hamaika pauso*, thinks that "Oso objetu zehatz, mugatua, elementu bat aukeratu beharko duela bistaren euskarritzat" [he will have to fix his eyes on a single element, one single object] (*Hamaika pauso* 1995, 7–8). Apparently, he transfers to his own death, or more precisely to the anticipated imagination of his own death, the last impression of Zabalegi, who at the last moment seeks support for his gaze in "magnolia ezinezko baten hostoa" [the leaf of an impossible magnolia tree] (*Hamaika pauso* 1995, 357). In reality, Abaitua could not have known that last reflex act of someone he had seen only once and for the briefest moment, someone who in any case could not have told anyone about his last earthly impression. The transference happens in the opposite direction. Abaitua transfers to Zabalegi's death his own nostalgia for a memory that has long since pervaded the landscape Abaitua chooses to die in: the Bay of Chingudi at the mouth of the Bidasoa river, the background of the place where Julia had once offered him a magnolia flower (*Hamaika pauso* 1995, 22–23).

Saizarbitoria weaves the deaths of Zabalegi and Abaitua into a thick textual web formed by a childhood reading of *Una mañana de invierno en Inglaterra*, a popular novel about a British spy, the court martial summary against Zabalegi, inspired by the actual court record of Angel Otaegi's process, newspaper headlines, conversations with real-life characters such as José María Bandrés, and literary and critical (even metacritical) references whose purpose is to incorporate the reflection on form to the narrative content. The interpenetration of Zabalegi's and Abaitua's destinies, triggered by the fortuitous forgetting of a cigarette lighter, develops gradually, while Abaitua gathers the materials to write a book about Zabalegi's death titled *Hamaika pauso*, which is not – it cannot be, on account of reflexivity – the novel the reader is occupied with. How to explain this apparent doubling and suggested replication? Simply, through an alteration of conventional writing by inverting the point of view. In the novel, this inversion has to do with Abaitua's growing sense of futility in his philological work, as his obsession with Zabalegi's fate increases and his emotional identification with the ETA collaborator makes him the vicarious protagonist of the book he plans to write. Abaitua does not broach this project on the level of detached archival research but from the intuition of the bleeding spirit of a man who dies in the no man's land between the filthy, irrational hatred of the Spanish police and the empty patriotic hallowing of the Basque nationalist community.

The narrative's complexity, its false starts, meandering progress, and new beginnings; the narrator's countless steps, which will not reach the goal except by leaping over the external description to direct participation in duration and death – all this arises from the incommensurability between the simplicity of intuition and the expressive means available. Abaitua realizes that a definition is not a phrase sewn to a word with the thread of a stable thought. Stable relations between signs and meaning are a fiction; the dictionary is founded on it. Challenging

the mirage of common sense (and common meanings), Bergson asserts: “The truth is that above the word and above the phrase there is something much simpler than a phrase and even than a word: the meaning, which is less a thing that is thought than a movement of thought; and less a movement than a direction” (1934, 152). A movement whose steps cannot be counted, only provisionally suspended in order to start all over again, progressing through the various inner planes until one reaches the plane of language, which communicates the inner and the outer, sound and sense, signifier and signified. Just as the phrase consists of preexisting words, narrative is put together with ready-made materials, in this case with narrative syntagms – hence the intertextual references to the popular novel, Gide, Proust, Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon, Unamuno, and others. Nevertheless, as Bergson remarks, the phrase can choose its initial elements arbitrarily, provided that the others are complementary (1934, 153). That is to say, the story may start almost in any way whatsoever, which explains the hesitant beginning of *Hamaika pauso*. But once the novel has got underway, an increasing necessity and narrative coherence manifest themselves, even if the story presents the aspect of *trencadís*, that is, of a work that is at once fragmentary and unified, like the Gaudí mosaics, which Claude Simon compared to the form of memory (*Hamaika pauso* 1995, 26).

If we agree that memory is the novel’s substance, we must also grant that memory is its primordial sense, the source of the inner necessity and coherence binding the phrases that the author has strung together apparently at random. But we must keep in mind that the sense of a work of art is less an object of thought than the movement of thought the work provokes, just as the Park Güell’s *trencadís* is not the broken china it is made of so much as the waving movement of the benches in which the fragments of cups, saucers, and dishes are integrated. This is how Saizarbitoria conceives memory and, as a result, the art of the novel: “Oroitzapenak apetaren hegale-tan etorri ohi direnez, zilegi da haien ordena ilun eta misteriotsua errespetatzea, kontakizuna konbentzionalki, kronologikoki edo linealki egokitzeaz arduratu gabe” [since memories tend to come to us rather whimsically, it is right to respect their secret and mysterious order, without being concerned to adopt a conventionally chronological layout for the narration] (*Hamaika pauso* 1995, 25). The narratological referents point again to Bergson, although he is never mentioned, and the author has declared that he has not read him (conversation with the author on July 11, 2013). The Bergsonian critique of chronology comes down through Michel Butor, who is cited in support of the idea that we rarely experience time as a continuous flow (*Hamaika pauso* 1995, 26). This, of course, refers to diachronic, abstract time, which we do not truly experience, because it exists only as a concept and a convention. It is a time, as Bergson would say, comprised of instants, which are static, juxtaposed images and can never furnish the intuition of time, the *durée*, just as we can never obtain a line by adding points or a poem by adding letters.

Abaitua is a contemplative character, hence his customary self-positioning by the window during the gatherings at Julia’s house. His drama stems from this irrepressible trait in a context where everything colludes to subordinate the intellect to praxis. His opposite is Ortiz de Zárate, a terrorist whose life has become a pure survival strategy. His operative superiority is basic skill to use the circumstances on the spur of the moment, without questioning the deeper nature of things. For him, Zabalegi was merely a liaison, Abaitua a minor collaborator from whom one exacts small services with an increasing level of risk, the armed struggle a war of national liberation. Zárate, no less than the political apprentices who meet at Julia’s house, confronts reality with concepts that muddle it. Abaitua realizes that concepts do not mirror reality’s mobility and instability, and that they themselves are volatile. It is not by chance that precisely when Iñaki closes his eyes to protect them from the sand, the wind blows away the stack of papers on which he had written his definitions of words for years. Concepts blind and create a parallel reality, so that things become ungraspable. “Ezingo dituzu denak jaso”



[You won't be able to catch them all], shouts a boy to Abaitua, who is running after the fluttering sheets of paper along the beach (*Hamaika pauso* 1995, 346). Losing those notes would have seemed a tragedy to him just one month earlier, but now, says the narrator, "Hendaiara joan eta, sinbolikoki hizkuntzari alde egiten utzi zion puntuan, Bidasoaz bestaldera so egon, besterik ez zuen nahi" [his only wish was to go to Hendaya and remain there, staring at the other bank of the Bidasoa, from that point where, symbolically, he had lost his language] (*Hamaika pauso* 1995, 347).

That point is, as Bergson would say, not so much a movement (or the cause of a movement) as a direction, which can be intuited if, instead of apprehending life and time by means of pre-existing concepts, one rejects the juxtaposition of abstract moments and steps into the concrete flow of duration. "Paperak besterik ez dira, paperak eta hitzak" [They're nothing but papers, papers and words] (*Hamaika pauso* 1995, 347), replies Abaitua to the boy. Nonetheless, he tucks away in his pocket the only piece of paper that the boy is able to catch. It is inscribed with the word *Heriotza*, the end of the human life (*Hamaika pauso* 1995, 347). Passing from abstraction to the feeling of duration and awareness of the end, Abaitua progresses toward the intuitive understanding of things and the mystical communion with Zabalegi's unwarranted and yet ineluctable death. Before he leaves the house on his suicidal mission, Abaitua takes one sheet from the aborted dictionary project to imitate Zabalegi's posthumous gesture when the latter tried in vain to write a good-bye note just before his execution. The sheet, chosen at random, corresponds to the word "muga" [frontier], defined as "zerbait amaitzen den tokia edo unea. Zu zara guztien hasiera, iturburua, iraupena eta muga" [the moment or place where something ends. You are the beginning, the springhead, the duration and frontier of all] (*Hamaika pauso* 1995, 441). Frontier: the place toward which Abaitua moves in time and space. It is the beginning, springhead, and duration of contemporary Basque reality, and also the condition of the unity of the novel's multiple points of view, the gathering in one single duration of the constellations of memories issuing from the Big Bang of the consciousness of one's own death. It is this consciousness that sets off the narrative, the countless steps that Abaitua takes inside his memory and constitute the march, the discourse of this remarkable novel.

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