

# BETWEEN *HARRI* *ETA HERRI* AND *ETIOPIA*: MODERNITY IN BASQUE POETRY

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**Abstract** || The main aim of this paper is to propose a new periodization and a new conceptualization of modernity within Basque poetry. In contrast with other theories, it defends that poetic modernity was set up and established by the generation right after Gabriel Aresti's. Thus, it will analyze the path that runs from Aresti's contemporary poet Mikel Lasá to Bernardo Atxaga's *Etiopia*, that is to say, the period of modernity's development. Apart from the already mentioned, the contemporaneous poetic production of Ibon Sarasola, Joseanton Artze (Hartzabal), Amaia Lasá, Arantxa Urretabizkaia, and Mikel Arregi will also be considered.

**Keywords** || Modernity | Poetry | Basque Literature.

## 0. Introduction

Some critics (Kortazar, 2009; Aldekoa, 2000) consider that the origin of modern Basque poetry can be found in Mirandi and Aresti's poetry. Others (Gabilondo, 2006) think that modern Basque poetry begins with *Etiopia*. On this debate we can find, on the one hand, the discussion on modernity and, on the other hand, the reading of history of Basque poetry, which, needless to say, is different according to each critic.

Therefore, in this article we propose a different interpretation of the evolution undergone by Basque poetry in this period, from some nuances on poetic modernity. Further than the importance of the books *Harri eta Herri* and *Etiopia*, we will stress other works, poetics and authors, with the belief that they are as —and sometimes more— important than the two mentioned, from the point of view of the Basque poetic modernity. Therefore, one of the main aims of this article consists of questioning the current poetic canon and offering new authors and pathways.

Many different approaches can be used, and have, in fact, been used, to analyze modernity. The sociological systemic reading (Gabilondo, 2006) focuses on the composition of the Basque literary system, and establishes *Etiopia* and Pott Banda as fundamental agents<sup>1</sup>. The analysis we are interested in, however, is based on the aesthetic field, that is, modern Basque poetry will be interpreted from the perspective of aesthetic modernity. The theoretical-critical paradigm that underlies this work will be that of the Frankfurt School (on its broader sense), whose members, as is well known, made interpretations based on the autonomy of aesthetics and art by joining several disciplines.<sup>2</sup> Their works —especially *Aesthetic Theory*— form the nucleus of the aesthetic approach to modernity, as well as its radicalization, modernism. In poetry in particular, the start point will be Hugo Friedrich's *The Structure of Modern Lyric*, a classic among the classics that addresses the issue of poetic modernity. Although not from the Frankfurt School, we can place it in the line of the great German Romanists (Erns Robert Curtius, Erich Auerbach, Leo Spitzer), who put the aesthetical approach on the core of their analysis.

## 1. Poetic Modernity

Friedrich highlights that one of the main characteristics of modern poetry is its opacity. This is clear from the first sentence of the book: "El acceso a la lírica europea del siglo XX no es cosa fácil, en cuanto ésta se expresa por medio de enigmas y misterios" (Friedrich, 1974:

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### NOTES

1 | Although we cannot deny that Gabilondo's analysis is as pioneering as interesting, I consider that it gives an excessive systemic importance to *Etiopia* and Pott Banda. There is no doubt that it will be the object of a more profound analysis, but I would say that the publishing house Lur, the magazine *Oh Euzkadi*, and Ramón Saizarbitoria's novels had a bigger impact than the previous ones on the creation of the Basque literary system.

2 | See, among others, Adorno's *Teoría estética* (2004) and Marcuse's *La dimensión estética* (2007).

21). But this opacity, at the same time, fascinates and disconcerts the reader.<sup>3</sup> This way, the fact of not understanding a poem completely does not lead to totally abandon it. The German theorist calls the effect produced on the reader *dissonance*.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in this sense, the modern poet does not look for a communicative proximity, and the language used is not usually descriptive. This way, the difference between common language and poetic language goes from being relative—in pre-modern poetry—to radical. Therefore, even the classical concept of text understanding is questioned, and it is admitted that a modern poem cannot be totally explained, that no complete and definitive explanation can be achieved.<sup>5</sup>

To attain this dissonance, the poet must break the reader's ideas, that is, break the reader's literary experience, what he expects. That is why he has to look for a radical rupture with poetic tradition; he has to break with the past to surprise the reader and create something 'new'. This radicalism also frequently causes that the poet is unsuccessful and misunderstood, and this is how the figures of *poètes maudits*, fully related to poetic modernity, were created. Moreover, the signifier prevails over the meaning: first, there is a loss of confidence on the immediate and naïf relationship between language and reality, and attention is focused on the properties of the word itself—the rupture of words, the spatiality, the musicality, etc.—. The same happens with the relationship between the self and language, and that is why, according to Friedrich and T. S. Elliot, history of modern poetry is, largely, the history of progressive *depersonalization* of poetry—with Baudelaire as the start point— (1974: 48-51; 211).

## 2. Aresti's Poetry

Aresti has been many times described as a contradictory character, regarding some aspects. He may not have been contradictory in his poetics, but it was subject to variations as the years passed. Much has been said on the evolution of Aresti's poetry (Aldekoa, 2008: 238-250), but not as much on Aresti's poetic thinking.

In a lecture given in San Sebastian in 1960, entitled "Poesia eta euskal poesia", he defended a "poematika" (poetics), that is, the need of cultivating the poetic awareness of the poet. Although he mentioned many issues, he developed a rather modern poetical thinking in two ways. This is clear on the way he addresses the difference between the *laureatus* poet and the outsider poet, as well as the differences between the essence of poetry and the shape of poetry. Regarding the first aspect, he claims the role of the outsider poet, the one that does not receive the applause and the easy laugh of the public, in a way, the fully modern marginal poet. As regards the second, he is

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## NOTES

3 | Viktor Shklovsky's concept of distancing (Viñas, 2011), also used by Novalis, is appropriate, for example, to explain this effect.

4 | Friedrich gives many examples of those who acclaim darkness: Charles Baudelaire, Gottfried Benn, Saint-John Perse, Eugenio Montale, and not only poets, Igor Strawinsky.

5 | This is the concept of *immensity* that Wolfgang Iser would use years later, especially for modern literature.

in favour of the articulation of the essence/shape of poetry, that is, he claims the union of both poles, instead of positioning in favour of one of them. In all its simplicity, this has been an issue that most modern aesthetics have highlighted, from the Russian formalists to the above-mentioned Adorno. In this lecture, he also mentions his short story “Olerkaria”. This short story is also very interesting for the issue we are dealing with. In fact, it tells the story of a poet who, after dedicating his whole life to write poetry—he wrote 14,256,000 points—, dismissed all the excess lines and left only one verse: “Gizonaren gorputza/ buztinezkoa da”. It is the story of a poet that walks towards silence, who moves towards void. And not only, as the verse that finally remains is the one that was already written—in the Bible—. The image is without any doubt modern. The poetics of silence, as well as the modern radical idea of intertextuality, have affected twentieth century high literature.

Nevertheless, in some texts written years later, he starts to support some ideas influenced by social poetry. His lecture “Mentalidad poética vasca” of 1968, is an excellent way to observe the change on his poetics. For example, his reading on Basque Renaissance is very significant:

[la *Berpizkunde*] es una literatura idealista, sin ningún interés social, que no trata ni toca de cerca ni de lejos los problemas del hombre de la calle; naturalmente no encuentra eco en el pueblo. Los libros no se venden, los lectores son escasísimos. Además, quitando acaso únicamente la honorísima y meritorísima excepción de Lizardi, la calidad literaria es muy escasa. (Aresti, 1986: 104)

The rejection of what Aresti considers idealistic poetry can be related to the symbolist poetry/realistic poetry dichotomy—acclaiming the second and despising the first—which a few years before Josep Maria Castellet used in *Veinte años de poesía española*. The idealistic poetry mentioned by Aresti and Castellet’s symbolist poetry are very near, and we must remember that the anthology had a huge influence on the peninsula. Going back to Aresti, the dependence of poetry regarding the situation of Euskara can be noted more clearly later in this article. On that period, Aresti’s poetics depended on extra-poetic issues.

Quizá fue él (Orixe) quien nos hizo fijarnos en la verdadera esencia del versolarismo. El nos dio a conocer que nuestro pueblo auténtico tenía sus poetas auténticos, que el campesinado que surgió fiel a los modos tradicionales de vida, tenía una literatura oral única en el mundo, e hizo que el escribir en vasco fuera una cosa importante. (Aresti, 1986: 104-105)

From this point and to the end of the lecture, Aresti develops a discourse in favour of the survival of Euskara, mainly to confront

Unamuno. In this sense, what he expressed in an interview for the magazine *Triunfo* in 1975 is also very significant: “La poesía para mí no es sino un medio didáctico de la educación de las masas. Por lo tanto, he tenido que utilizar una clase de lenguaje muchas veces no poético” (Aresti, 1986: 229). This statement shows the essence of that period’s poetry of commitment, dependent on a certain ordinary materialist-mechanicist ideology. He even claims the use of a non-poetic language, that is, he renounces poetry itself, driven by social reasons.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. After Aresti

As we said, the intellectual presence and influence of Aresti was so important that even those who offered alternatives to his poetry (Izaguirre, Atxaga) hardly confronted him discursively. Izaguirre’s case, for example, is extremely interesting. In the lecture “Txipitasunaren iraultza (etxemaitez eta espetxez)”, he first stands against those who state that Aresti is only the poet who wrote *Maldan behe*, although as he goes on, his detailed analyses constantly suggest this distinction regarding Aresti. He reflects as follows about the general characteristics of the generation that followed Aresti:

Aresti ondoko belaunaldiaren ezaugarrietako bat gai zehatzetako poemak ez egitea da. Ez du gai bat hartu eta haren inguruko bariazioak edo metaforak landuko. Idazkera automatikora heldu gabe baina, etorria laxo utziko du, anti-intelektuala du jarrera poemagintzan, eta helburua edertasuna du, ez didaktismoa. Ez du poema ideien garapenez sortzen, bere poesia ez da diskursiboa. Nahiago du irudiaren indarra mezuaren zehaztasuna baino. (Izaguirre, 1993: 63)

Lack of attachment to the subject, lack of didacticism, non-discursive poetry, the strength of images... all those are the most fundamental characteristics of modern poetry, as we have seen before with Friedrich. In that lecture, Izaguirre mentions the famous “Ez dezagula konpostura gal, halare”, from the first number of *Ustela*, signed by Izaguirre and Atxaga, that could be considered the manifest of that new generation. Indeed, there is no doubt that the text is very appropriate to explain Aresti’s rupture with social poetics. It acclaims both transgression and iconoclasm: “Geurea, euskal literaturari astinaldi bortitzak ematea da” (Atxaga et al., 1975). It defends the autonomy of literature, another clearly modern characteristic (Bürger, 2009): “Zeren literaturak bai bait du bere dinamika propioa ta berezia” (Atxaga et al., 1975). It highlights the distance with respect to common language: “Literatura espresabide da lehen lehenik, eta ondorioz, komunikabide” (Atxaga et al., 1975). The literary journals (*Ustela*, *Oh Euzkadi*, *Pott*, *Susa*...) will be the main mean of expression of this new generation, and the most acclaimed and referential book of poems will be precisely Atxaga’s *Etiopia*.

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#### NOTES

6 | It is also possible to vindicate a non-poetical language for aesthetical reasons, as the anti-poetry (Nicanor Parra) does, for example, but Aresti’s reasoning has nothing to do with that.

#### 4. Ethiopia versus *Harri eta Herri*

On the time span taken into account on this investigation, what stands out is the contradiction between two books: *Harri eta Herri* and *Etiopia*. For many, the first one is the fundamental book of the first Basque modern poet—together with Mirande— whose influence covered a whole era. On the other hand, the second one would comprise the strongest poetic response to Aresti and the social poetry he represented. As for the contradiction Aresti/Atxaga (Gabilondo, 2006; Kortazar, 2009), most agree to a greater or lesser extent, although they place the origin of modernity in one or the other. However, it is not correct to say that it was Pott who dissolved “euskal letrek (ez literaturak) jardun hizkuntzalari eta abertzaleekin ordura arte zituzten lotura hertsia” (Gabilondo, 2006: 87), because, as we will see in this article, there were also those who broke those ties before Pott. There are numerous examples of those who try to make poetry on the margins of Aresti’s great poetic shadow and social function: Mikel Lasa, Mikel Azurmendi, Ibon Sarasola, Amaia Lasa, JosAnton Artze, Mikel Arregi, Arantxa Urretabizkaia, Koldo Izagirre.

As we said, there is no doubt that Aresti’s figure was the main one in the evolution of Basque culture. It can be said that his work in favour of Euskara and a modern Basque culture influenced a whole generation. Writers from completely different political and literary ideologies have recognised their intellectual debt with him: from Ramón Saizarbitoria to Bernardo Atxaga. Even many poets that confronted Aresti’s poetic hegemony have recognised and admired his extraordinary importance.

The effect of *Harri eta Herri* in the theory of Basque poetry can be observed by reading two texts by Juan de San Martín from 1966 and 1968. In 1968 he wrote the prologue of the first book of poems of Xabier Lete, *Egunetik egunera orduen gurrpilean*, where he clearly positions himself in favour of “funtzional” poetry, that is, in favour of poetry related to social issues. He believes Basque literature should pay attention to the people in need, that poetry should put its voice at the service of the people and introduce Euskara in the reflections of the Basque in need. He claims the immediate practicality of poetry. “Une historiko huntan positibismo beharrean arkitzen gera gauzak aldatuko baditugu herri bezala iraun ahal izateko, gizon guztien arteko justizia baterat abiatu dezagun” (1968: 4). In 1966, as a member of the jury of the poetry contest Agora, he highlights four of the works presented. It was in an article written in *Jakin* in 1966 where he reveals this four works: *Pekatu zaharrak eta siñismen berriak*, by Xabier Lete; *Ahuntzaren gauerdiko eztulak*, by Ibon Sarasola; *Bidez bide*, by Joxe Azurmendi, and *Mindura gaur*,

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attributed to Eusebio Erkiaga by mistake (it was actually from Juan Mari Lekuona). Although he pointed out the high level of the four of them, the jury—including San Martín— finally chose Lete’s work. He defines Lete’s poetry as “gizarte gaidun poesia funtzional” and “era berriko poesia sozial” (1968: 5). This way, he comments on a social poem by Lete in Jakin’s article: “Au da gaurko gizonaren garraxia, ta ez Rilke eta Juan Ramón’en poesiaren poesia. Au da lagun hurkoa maitatzea” (1966: 69). In fact, the first part of the book, which has been completely forgotten in Lete’s poetry, is generally distanced from this poetic trend and some of these poems (“Gaur, Biar eta Beti”, “Bide ezkutua”, “Hauek dira...”) could be read as precursors of many of the poetic proposals that would appear in the 70s (Sarasola, Artze, Atxaga). As the two remaining parts of the book and the path followed by the poet from then on moved towards a certain poetry of the experience and social poetry, that is what the Basque poetry reader remembers, but from a literary point of view and, of course, from the point of view of our subject, that is, aesthetical modernity, we consider the above mentioned poems have a much greater importance and value.

With *Harri eta Herri*, Aresti reached the poetical centre of the Spanish poetry of his time. The influence that poets who wrote in Spanish (Blas de Otero, Gabriel Celaya) had on him is well known (Aldekoa, 2008). It has been mentioned in numerous occasions that Aresti underwent a shift from symbolist poetry (*Maldan behera*) to social poetry. In this sense, we must point out that, in this context, the Basque critics use the word ‘symbolist’ without any accuracy. They repeat the peculiarities of the predominant mode of expression in Spain on the fifties and the sixties, especially, on the prologue of the book that is fundamental to understand the importance of social poetry, the above-mentioned *Veinte años de poesía española*, and the distinction that is made on it between social (realistic) poetry/ symbolist poetry. On the said prologue, Castellet uses the term “symbolism” on a very vague way, as that is what he calls all the modernist and avant-garde poetic essays, that is, the non-engaged formalist poetry.

En estas condiciones, no es de extrañar que se predique y practique una poesía irrealista y evasiva, formalista y esteticista: Mallarmé llegará a ser el máximo representante del movimiento simbolista que, con algunas variaciones teóricas, pero siempre dentro de una línea formalista y no comprometida, será proseguido a su muerte por esa gran floración de poetas europeos que van de Valéry a Ungaretti, pasando por Eliot, Benn, Saint-John Perse, etc. (Castellet, 1960: 31)

Therefore, symbolism on a strict and exact sense is a movement that took shape on the French tradition, somewhere between Baudelaire and Mallarmé, but that Castellet, in his canonizing effort, extends, and in a negative sense. Nowadays, however, being rigorous, Benn

would hardly be considered as a member of the symbolist movement, and the same can be said about *Maldan behera*, which, among other things, was written half a century after Mallarmé's death.

Anyway, the fundamental idea is the following: that the cycle Aresti started with *Harri eta Herri* (*Euskal Harria, Harrizko Herri Hau*) was marked by the Spanish poetic centre of the time. And the triumph of these poetic ideas can only be understood from the point of view of the Spanish literary system, as the poetic modernity that prevailed in Europe, specially in the West —represented in fact by those poets underestimated by Castellet in the sixties, among others—, was following completely different paths, as Friedlich's book wisely states. The huge influence of Aresti and *Harri eta Herri* on Basque poetry and Basque culture in general is undeniable and apart from that, he made an exceptional work on the renovation (Standard Basque) and spreading of Euskara. However, we should consider if Aresti's poetry has the same importance beyond the aesthetical point of view and especially beyond the hegemonic Spanish literary ideology of the time. In this sense, we can say that modern Basque poetry definitely developed as a response to Aresti's poetry of the hammer, rather than with the hammer itself. Although there were precedents (the Renaissance, Mirande, the first poetry of Aresti),<sup>7</sup> modern Basque poetry, as we will try to explain, is completely materialized on the seventies, not only with *Etiopia*, but with a rather large set of verses that started with Mikel Lasa.

## 5. Between Aresti and Atxaga

There is a fourteen-year difference between *Harri eta Herri* and *Etiopia*, and is during those years when Basque modern poetry is, thus, formed. Of course, as in every periodization, many precedents can be found, as mentioned before. However, those who totally and absolutely assumed the most fundamental characteristics of modern poetry were the poets after Aresti. Not only Izaguirre, Atxaga, and the following (Sarrionandia, Irastorza, Montoia...), but also those between this young generation and Aresti.

### 5.1. Mikel Lasa and Spleen

His first book was *Tamariza eta pikondoa*, published in 1967. However, some of the poems that appear on it had been published on some magazines during the 60s and therefore some of them are previous to *Harri eta Herri*. That is, it cannot be said that Lasa's poetry was constructed as a reaction to Aresti's.

Lasa captured the spirit of modernity, that spleen or Baudelaire's

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## NOTES

7 | Lizardi and Lauaxeta's contribution to all this remains to be stated.

*ennui*,<sup>8</sup> better than any other Basque poet to that moment. Lasa's poetical world is full of melancholy, and this is the symbology used: the fog, the soft rain, the seagulls (remember Baudelaire's "L'Albatros"), the sea... The dominant season of his poetry is autumn. It is confirmed just by observing the first two verses of his poem "Tamariza eta pikondoa": "Euriaren tristea/ ari ta ari atergabeko amaian". Although brief, these two verses synthesize many elements. On one side, the sadness is related to a recurring symbol, the rain. On the other side, the end appears, connected to that modern feeling that is apathy (Verlaine-Mallarmé), but that is reflected through an oxymoron, because it is incessant. We also find the end and the nothingness in other moments, sometimes in a paradoxical way, for example on the famous end of the same poem: "'DANA'-k ta 'NADA'-k zirkulua bukatzen dute". Besides, that same paradoxical character frequently appears on modern poetics (Adorno, 2004). The same way, such spleen is expressed on "j... Mais Débarrassé de qui?...", a poetic prose about Sundays.

This modern feeling is totally related to the aura of doom mentioned before. Usually, the modern poetic self finds itself in solitude, misunderstood, on the margins of society, and this is what we find on Lasa's poetry. "Poeta berria" could be an adequate example, where the desire of linking with the European poetic modernity is also expressed: "Munduaren hatsa// nahi nuke atzeman/ Europako bide ugarietan/ (hainbeste jendetza eta ni hain bakar)". Also, the aura of doom appears in one of his most well-known poems, "Txorabioa": "kontra nagoena naiz/ kontraren kontra/ ta inor ez dago nere alde".

This mood of Lasa's poetical self has nothing to do with Aresti's messianism. We can find many cross quotations between Aresti's and Lasa's works. Lasa acclaims Aresti's contribution (Lasa, 1993), but at the same time, he highlights the insolvability of the relation between Aresti and the modernist tradition. In fact, Lasa is the only poet that dares to directly respond to the wide shadow of Aresti, at least regarding poetics or poetic reflection.

Hay en Aresti (*Maldan Behera*) una influencia de T.S. Eliot, es indudable. Una influencia producida por una lectura seguramente demasiado rápida y en todo caso no asimilada. Nada en la vida y los escritos de Aresti hace presentir la espiritualidad de Eliot (Lasa, 1993: 290).

## 5.2. Ibon Sarasola, a Builder Poet

The poetic work of Sarasola is quite small.<sup>9</sup> His only contribution was the book of poems *Poemagintza*, of 1969. Though brief, we find on it many of the characteristics of poetic modernity, distant from those used by other contemporary poets (Lasa, Artze), that can be considered as clear precedents of Atxaga's work, *Etiopia*.

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## NOTES

8 | The comparison is not forced, there is, among others, Lasa's poem "Baudelaireren gisan".

9 | Another poet that can be linked to Sarasola's poetic is Mikel Azurmendi, who has an even more reduced work than Sarasola (most of it appeared on the book *Euskal Eleri* 69) and for that reason the analysis of his poetry was not taken into account on this work.

Even before starting to read the first poem of the book we can find the first modern trait. It is expressed on the previous note: “gaur eguneko herriak/ ene hitzak onhartzen ez/ baditu/ biharkoari mintzatuko/ naiz edo/ etzikoari”. There is probably no modern confession in Basque poetry as early as this one. We mentioned before how modernity is linked to the newest aesthetical values, and how this can lead to incomprehension in its time. Juan San Martín pointed that out in some declarations to the magazine *Anaitasuna*: “[*Poemagintza*] Minorientzat dela? Ta zer?” (San Martín, 1970). The idea that we find in the whole book is that of the poem that constructs, of a certain engineer/poet, as can be seen on his first famous poem (“CCLXXVI”). The importance that music has on the whole book also approaches it to symbolism,<sup>10</sup> and the same way, we can find here and there the spleen or *ennui* that we find on Lasa (“CCCLVII”), together with the crisis of the meaning: “sentidurik ez du/ ten hitzak”. On the other hand, the distinction as regards Aresti’s “poetry of the hammer” is presented clearly on the poem “CCCLXXXVII”, where Aresti himself constitutes the ironic centre.

Gabriel Arestiri  
esan behar diot  
mailu guztiak  
poesia direla  
baina ez  
poesia guztiak  
mailu  
Mailu guztiak eta poesia guztiak...  
(Sarasola, 1969: 25)

The influence Lasa had on Sarasola was mentioned many times (Lasa, 1983), but we have to highlight that Sarasola went into poetic paths that Lasa had not explored. Formally, he provided the graphical rupture and the expansion of the poetic space of the page, a characteristic that soon Artze would take to the limit and that in the case of Lasa was hardly seen. Moreover, he started using intertextuality with profusion, more than Lasa and with a greater strength. Irony and self-irony lead him to make fun of the rigorous and complete poetic self, as shown in the poem-text “Gaur arratsaldean”. Besides, the agile fusion of high culture —mainly classical music— and pop culture can be appreciated in a way never experimented before in Basque poetry. These are all characteristics that make *Poemagintza* the main precedent of Atxaga’s work, *Etiopia*.<sup>11</sup> The poem “Poeta bat hirian” is especially comparable to some parts of *Etiopia*.

### 5.3. JosAnton Artze “Hartzabal” and Visual Poetry

Artze is probably the most underestimated poet between Aresti and Atxaga. Although part of his work, in one way or another, has been noted, he has not been taken into account, as he should, as one of

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## NOTES

10 | To measure the importance of music in symbolism and poetic modernity, see Poe et al. (2010).

11 | If in Sarasola we have “Periodiko saltzailea”, in Atxaga “Berripaper saltzailea”.

the big poets of the second half of the twentieth century. His best-known texts are those used by some of the musicians of the group Ez Dok Amairu, but his true poetic contribution has not been recognized. Although Lasa and Sarasola, in a way, have been presented as an alternative to Aresti's poetry (Aldekoa 2004), the same cannot be said about Artze, although he probably formed that alternative with more radicalism than anyone. Besides, he is one of the most prolific poets of the time frame considered on this article.

Artze's poetry was often considered as an essay taken to the limit, without further explanation. It has been tagged as visual poetry and placed on the radical avant-garde, as if it was just an eccentricity. Even an experimented and smart poetry reader as Izaguirre, in an attempt to differentiate his generation from the previous one, states that "Hartzabalen saioa pertsonalegia da" (Izagirre, 1993: 65). Similarly, Josu Landa says: "Joxe Antonio Artze "Hartzabal" denboratik aparte dagoen poeta da. Bere lanegiteko modua baino bakartiagorik ezin aurkitu mundu osoan ere. [...] Ahistorikoa da zeharo, eta ahistorizismo horrek utziko du, hain zuzen, literatur historia guztietatik kanpo" (Landa, 1983: 95). It is precisely there where we can find one of the reasons of Artze's exclusion. In fact, to give an example, he was not included in one of the most important poetic anthologies of the period, Iñaki Aldecoa's *Antología de la Poesía Vasca*, and the only mention of him in the prologue is as modest as meaningful: "José Antonio Hartzabal (Artze), entregado a su experimentalismo y poesía visual" (Aldekoa, 1993: 21). For his part, Kortazar places him on the chapter "Hiru olerkari konpromisodun" (Kortazar, 2000), making an even more inappropriate and twisted reading. Keeping out all radicalism, it is well known that in other literary traditions (for example, Juan Eduardo Cirlot in Spanish literature and Joan Brossa in Catalan literature), over time, virtual poetry and other experimentations have been quite normalized and integrated in the history of literature. Therefore, if we look closely, in the Western poetical practice in general, criticism of ahistoricism and too personal essays end up losing importance.

Artze's poetry is an adequate example to appreciate a certain explosion of the signifier in modern poetry. Even more, keeping the signifier apart, the physical space of the book itself becomes full of poetry, and therefore we cannot limit the aesthetical value to the transcription of each poem, because it exceeds that scope.<sup>12</sup> On his first book, *Isturitzetik Tolosan barru*, this aspect is already noticeable. Poetry comes closer to plastic arts in one way or another. We should not forget that this book was sold together with a recording, where Artze read some texts aloud, along with some experimental music. It is a rhetorical resource that constantly uses alliteration, to reinforce the signifier. It is well known that Verlaine wanted to move poetry towards music, as he says in the famous poem: "Art poétique": "Prends l'éloquence et tords-lui son cou! [...] De la musique encore

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12 | The two main precursors of this kind of poetry may be William Blake and Stéphane Mallarmé.

et toujours!”. Keeping the meaning of words away (“l’élouquence”) and looking for the music of the signifier. The criticism of positivism that we find in Artze’s poetry is also quite modern—even though the opposite cliché is very widespread—, coming from the criticism that German idealist philosophy made to enlightened mechanicism. There are his famous texts on work and the machine, or the poem “zuhaitzak ? gizonari itzala emateko”.

Another important aspect on Artze is his considerations about the reader, the recipient. When he writes, he is very aware of the reader’s function. He gives him a great importance, even suggesting that poetry would not probably exist without him. This idea is present in all his books, be it metaphorically (“liliak ederrago dira/ norbaitek usaintzean; txorien kantua ere/ norbaitek entzutean” —Artze, 2007—) or directly:

liburu honi falta zaion zatia  
beha ezazu,  
hor, zure etxean nunbait gordetik dago.  
Zure eta neurearen arteko bidea  
erdiraino ibiltzen saiatu naiz;  
ezin ninteke aurrerago joan.  
Zure zureari diotan begiruneak  
ez dit gehiagora uzten.  
(Artze, 1973)

But the greatest evidence of this is maybe on the book *bide bazterrean hi eta ni kantari*, where the reader must complete each letter of the book through numbers, as if it was a child’s game. The reader will not be able to read the poems correctly until completing the words. This relationship with meaning and the reader is the opposite of Aresti’s stone cycle, where the reader has a much more passive function before the closed and precise meanings.

## 5.4 On the Path of Spleen

With all their differences and particularities, Amaia Lasa, Arantxa Urretabizkaia, and Mikel Arregi could be included on the path of spleen, started by Mikel Lasa.

Amaia Lasa’s best-known poem, “Nereak ez diren”, already shows that we are before a poet with a totally modern personality. She vindicates novelty: “a/ e/ i/ o/ u/ berri bat esan nahi nuke”. And with it, the break with tradition: “Nereak ez diren/ lurralde hauetatik/ ihes egin nahi nuke”. Besides, this novelty is undoubtedly liked with a feminist claim, as there were almost no Basque female writers in history: “Hutsunean igeri dabilen emakume bat izaten naiz”. Moreover, this claim is constructed without any trace of essentialism, which would constitute a precedent for a certain queer identity.<sup>13</sup> All these modern

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## NOTES

13 | See the poem “Ez emakume”.

elements are related to the spleen that we also find on the work of his brother Mikel. In poems as “Egunean desioaren gogoia hila” or “Mutikoa ez dute maite”, subjects as apathy and loneliness are treated in a direct way. However, such spleen does not simply result on a passive nihilism, and the poetic self makes a rebel attempt to violently transform this situation. The poem “Jaungoiko guztiak ukatzen dituen...” can constitute an appropriate example of this rebellion, and violence can be perceived, mainly, along all the book of poems *Hitz nahastuak*. Its imaginary is similar to his brother’s, a foggy and sad shore, on Izagirre’s words “iruditeria xume eta konstante horren bidez —itsasoa, lurra, haizea, kaioa— oso sinesgarri egiten zaigun giro teluriko batean biltzen gaitu” (Izagirre, 2001: 8). As we will see, it is an imaginary shared by all the poems written in that atmosphere of spleen.

This same melancholic feeling is also detected in Urretabizkaia’s poetry, a frustration caused by the passing of time and the lost of childhood. “Gau hartan dago haurtzaroaren/ muga,/ hesia,/ zorionaren azken esperantza,/ gau hartan hil zen ene/ inozentzia,/ San Pedro bezpera bateko/ gau madarikatu hartan”. However, as with Amaia Lasa, the poetic self rebels against this spleen, not to fall to idealism, but to claim resistance and struggle. It seems that the awareness of being oppressed because of being a woman does not allow both Amaia Lasa and Urretabizkaia to plunge into an inert pessimism. In Urretabizkaia’s case, certain resentment towards society is perceived, that does not reach the level of Xabier Montoia’s poetry of a few years later, but that turns out to be quite tough in certain moments. As an example, we can quote the second part of the poem “San Pedro bezperaren ondokoak 1” where she speaks about the relationship with her father with great severity. As regards symbolism, besides the already mentioned grey days, also appear fog, rain, and dusk: “Ziur nago:/ egun gris,/ motel batez jaio nintzen,/ eguzkirik gabeko egun epel batez,/ bi gau beltzek inguratutako/ une gelatinatsu batez”.

Mikel Arregi has sometimes been considered as Aresti’s successor (Aldekoa 2008:265), besides being linked to existentialism (Lekuona, 1975:13). However, there are several fundamental elements that differentiate him from Aresti and Lete’s messianic poetry, and move him towards modernity. In this sense, despite prejudices, it is more adequate to relate him to the poetic ethos of Lasa’s spleen. Compared to the others, Arregi’s tendency to reflect on his own writing is especially worth mentioning, and a certain lack or shortage is attributed to him: “ene bertsoa ez da segurua”. Here is a quite meaningful poem dedicated to his writing: “zu hartzen zaitudanean/ sentitzen dudana/ mina da,/ sasi-poetak sentitzen duen mina,/ esan ezin,/ ahaleginak ez ezina”. This awareness of the problematic nature of language is completely modern,<sup>14</sup> and hard to find in Aresti’s or Lete’s work, for

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14 | Remember Samuel Beckett’s “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better” (1984).

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example. On the other hand, the poet being excluded from society, this kind of bohemian trend, solitude, is also very present in his poetry. Arregi's poetic mood is related to sorrow, to unhappiness, it is presented as if he was tired of life. The last verse of the book *Hego haizearen konpasean*, "XXIX" is probably the most obvious example, but we find it along the whole book. The melancholic spirit can also be seen: "baina ez dago gelditzerik/ berriz ez naiz pasako hemendik". If Mikel Lasa had a poetic prose on Sundays, Arregi has one on Sunday evenings ("XXVIII"). There is no doubt that the mood has nothing to do with Aresti's poetry, let alone with *Harrizko herri hau*, although here we find a more exhausted Aresti. Moreover, the poem "V" is a nihilist flipside to Aresti's poem "Egia bat esateagatik", an unexpected turn before Aresti's heroism. Similarly to the poets mentioned in this subsection, Arregi takes the sad imaginary of the coast, although he was born inland (Areso), contrary to the others. The poem "XXV" is a good example of it.

## 5.5 Conclusions

Up to now, the critics have highlighted three particular moments on the genealogy of modern Basque poetry. The first corresponds to the Renaissance, and generally the main figure is Lizardi. The second moment focuses on the couple Mirande-Aresti, but highlights the work of the second, both because it is broader and more complete, and because it had a deeper influence on the generations that followed. Finally, Pott Banda has been mentioned, especially Bernardo Atxaga and *Etiopia*.

However, in order to give shape to poetic modernity, and even though there is a generation between Aresti and *Etiopia* as important as the aforementioned poets, it has been located in a second or third level. This path begins with the first attempts of Mikel Lasa and Ibon Sarasola, and ends with the poetry of Amaia Lasa, Mikel Arregi, and Arantxa Urretabizkaia. They all write from a clear modern poetic consciousness, and have a radically modern notion of the nature of language and poetry, as they link themselves with the most advanced movements and poets at the international level. For all that, they have a much more modern profile, especially when compared with Aresti's stone cycle, and open wider paths to *Etiopia*.

In many cases, the work of all these poets is dispersed and limited (that is the case of Ibon Sarasola, Mikel Arregi, and Arantxa Urretabizkaia), so they hardly can be compared to other poets with a long career. In any case, this is not JosAnton Artze's case. Besides having a vast work (between Aresti and *Etiopia* he published three books of poems), he is a poet with an incomparable poetic personality, many times underestimated or wrongly read, as we have

already explained. Without a doubt, Artze is a poet that deserves a central place on the genealogy of modern Basque poetry.

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