

William Shakespeare's plays in Basque

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Not long ago, Esteban Pujals wrote about translations of Shakespeare in Spain: «Cervantes was translated into English not long after the original *Don Quixote* came out. Shakespeare had to wait many years before he was to be known and translated in Spain»¹.

Jean Louis Curtis laments the same thing about the lateness of the English playwright's works being translated into the language of Molière: «Shakespeare was not translated into French for a long time after his death, not for more than a century after, in fact, and that despite the constant interchanges and the almost uninterrupted relations between the two countries. Why was there such a long wait for him to be translated and known in France? This delay is probably attributable to the universality of the French language in the XVIIth century and during the first half of the XVIIIth»².

In the case of Basque, the long wait that the critics above so lament stretched to three centuries before there was a feeble attempt to take on Shakespeare's towering work for the first time (in the second decade of the twentieth century). And for quite different reasons other than what the Frenchman Jean-Louis Curtis adduced, since, as professor Ibon Sarasola has stated, the year in which the Floral Games held by M. d'Abbadie were celebrated marks the starting point of modern Basque poetry and literature, strictly speaking³. On the other hand, the cultural space for Basque expression was quite limited and barely able to look outside of itself, in order to establish links with the great international aesthetic-literary currents and, even when it did so in a superficial way, that was thanks to the pioneering work of those involved in the cultural revival.

Note: This article was published in *Senez*, 16, 1996.

1. Pujals, Esteban (1985) Cuadernos de Traducción e Interpretación, 5/6, p. 77.
2. Curtis, Jean-Louis (1990). La Traduction Plurielle, p. 19, Lille: Ed. Michel Ballard, Presses Universitaires de Lille.
3. Sarasola, Ibon (1976). *Gabriel Aresti. Poemak (I)*, p.15, Donostia: Kriselu.

Toribio Alzaga (1861-1941)

As L. Mitxelena admits in his *Historia de la Lengua Vasca*, Donostia-San Sebastian was the cradle of modern Basque theatre: «The cradle of modern Basque theatre was San Sebastián. More precisely, it was born from the work of a group of donostiaras, refugees in Ciboure, fleeing the dangers and discomforts of the city under siege by the Carlists. In 1876, the same year Maurice Ravel was born in Ciboure, the bilingual “zarzuela” *Iriyarena*, by Marcelino Soroa».⁴

After the Carlist War was over, the Old Donostia Theatre came to be the main stage for Basque theatre and it spread to the towns of the province and to theatre-goers who wished to forget about the bloody internecine conflict and wanted to be entertained.

It was in such a situation that Toribio Alzaga came to the fore. Like Soroa, he was born in Donostia-San Sebastian and was the founder of modern Basque theatre and managed to raise the level of the theatre in Gipuzkoa without taking away its folk character. He came up with numerous comedies in that respect and translated several more such as Pierre Loti's *Ramuntcho* or Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. That was undoubtedly the first version of the renowned English playwright's work ever translated into Basque and was published under the title *Irritza*.⁵

Toribio Alzaga, who put the running of the *Euskal Iztundea* into the hands of the City Council, had, in Mitxelena's words, a special instinct for theatre: “He had greater good

taste, sense of the theatre, dramatic vigour and skill in his casting of the characters than his predecessors.”⁶ The work is written in Gipuzkoan Basque but it also includes words from other Basque dialects, several neologisms, and Arana-Goiri's new spelling, thereby achieving a linguistic balance between traditional theatre at the end of the 19th century and its practical side with another discourse that was unrestrained yet more cultivated. It has a suitable rhythm for staging compared to some other versions that were done later on as well as a greater communicative quality which is due to the fact that he was a playwright himself and had great experience as a theatre director.

Within the context of the Carlist War and a nascent cultural revival at the beginning of the century and apart from Alzaga's rather free translation of *Macbeth*, Shakespeare was nearly totally lost to the Basque cultural scene until Bingen Ametza, who should be considered as the forerunner of the colossal translation work of Bedita Larrakoetxea, published the translation of the single play, *Hamlet* (1956). However, Ametza's work, like the translation of several chapters of Juan Ramón Jiménez's *Platero y yo*, was a mere exercise in approaching universal literature by putting his newly learnt Basque to the test. In the case of the Larran Larrakoetxea, all of the plays of the Bard of Stratford-upon-Avon were to be patiently and systematically translated into Basque for the first time over the very same time period.

4. Michelena, Luis (1960). *Historia de la literatura Vasca*, p.138, Madrid: Minotauro

5. The book title says as much: “IRRITZA SHAKESPEAREAREN n MACBETH'en gayean, iru egintza eta egintza-aurrean TORIBIO ALZAGA'k euskeratutako antzerkia”

6. Michelena, Luis: op. cit., p.139.

Bedita Larrakoetxe, the Shakespearean translator

The first and only systematic translation into Basque of Shakespeare's theatrical works done hitherto belongs to the busy efforts of the Lateran canon, A. Bedita Larrakoetxea. After his ordination in 1917, he was to do his military service and broaden his knowledge of mathematics in Vitoria-Gasteiz. Afterwards, not only did he study that science, but Latin and Greek as well.

He later went to Oñati and there he trained young men. During that period, he also won several prizes in Basque magazines in which he was a frequent collaborator.

In 1937, he was forced into exile in England by the Spanish Civil War, together with a group of children and 16 friars, where he was to spend two years on the Isle of Wight and Southampton. From there, he sailed on to Uruguay and Argentina. He settled in the city of Salta, Argentina, and once again got down to the task of teaching such subjects as mathematics, English and physics at the school run by the Lateran order.

In a 1954 trip he made back to his home country, and seeing the dire situation of Basque as a result of the post-war cultural oppression, he resolved to immerse himself into the Basque cultural movement and, among other things, translate the plays of William Shakespeare into the language of his ancestors.

Upon the conclusion of his trip to the Basque Country and as soon as he was back

in Salta, he strenuously embarked on translating the great English bard's works into Basque, with the energy and fervor of someone tilling the ground.

He undertook the translation of several books into Basque when he learnt of a contest that was held for Basque translators in Paris and won the first prize. Among the first works that he translated into Basque were *The Tempest* and *Macbeth* which he published under the guidance of Jokin Zaitegi in the magazine *Euzko-Gogoa*.⁷

Larrakoetxea's translation work in context

In order to situate Bedita Larrakoetxea's translation work of Shakespeare's plays and to duly evaluate his contribution and sense of place, it is essential that the seething and ardent atmosphere that usually accompanies any revival should be taken into account, and as far as Basque culture is concerned, such a revival took place during the first three decades of the 20th century and lasted until the Spanish Civil War abruptly brought it to an end. Within the group of writers that were hard at work on bringing some new blood into Basque and Basque literature, there were two dreams that were especially etched in everyone's minds: in the same vein as the work *Mireio* by the Mistral of Provence, the dream was to come up with an important poem or literary work that would win admiration and respect for Basque in international literary circles and to translate the main works of universal literature into Basque so that it

7. The first post-war monolingual magazine was established in Guatemala in 1950 and appeared quarterly and was the meeting place of the best of Basque writers. In 1956, its founder, Jokin Zaitegi, moved to Biarritz in the Northern Basque Country and the last issue was printed in 1959. B. Larrakoetxe's translations were published in its last issues.

could be a rich language complete with contrasting references and models.

Of the Greek and Latin authors, Homer, Plato, Sophocles, and Virgil, etc. were among those chosen and using different criteria for modern authors, Oscar Wilde, Schiller, Mistral, some chapters from *Don Quixote*, *El Lazarillo de Tormes*, *St. John of the Cross*, etc. were also translated into Basque.

Once again, work on translating literary works into Basque was reinitiated and there were translations into Basque of H.W. Longfellow's *Evangeline*, Baroja's *Las inquietudes de Shanti Andia*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Ametzaga), J.R. Jimenez's *Platero y yo* (several chapters), Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, Svenson's *Noni and Mani*, etc. The task of systematically translating Shakespeare's towering works into Basque, which was later only to be paralleled by Jokin Zaitegi's translation into Basque of Plato's works, should be seen in the context of Bedita Larrakoetxea's offering and introductory literary models to Basque literature which hitherto had been marginalized by the clearly diglossic situation of the language, mainly confined to religious rural settings. Such a context as mentioned above should be uppermost in one's mind when analyzing and evaluating Larrakoetxea's work since that readily accounts for his choices of style and translation methods.

The Main Characteristics of Larrakoetxea's translation work

He also took into account versions translated directly from the original English, especially some Spanish ones which we are unfortunately familiar with. But he was not

altogether in favour of making use of these since the ones he used reportedly avoided translating directly by resorting to paraphrasing and circumlocutions. Bedita, for his part, preferred steering his translation as close to the original as much as possible and as a result his translation could be regarded as a moderately formalist version. He knew Basque through and through, especially the Biscayan dialect, and it was precisely that dialect that he used as a model for translating Shakespeare. However, as his contemporary critics pointed out — and even more so today as we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the formal establishment of the main bases and criteria of Unified Basque —, we can perceive the lack of a unified or a more united form of Basque, especially when most authors, even in his time, had used the so-called "enhanced Gipuzkoan" in their works.

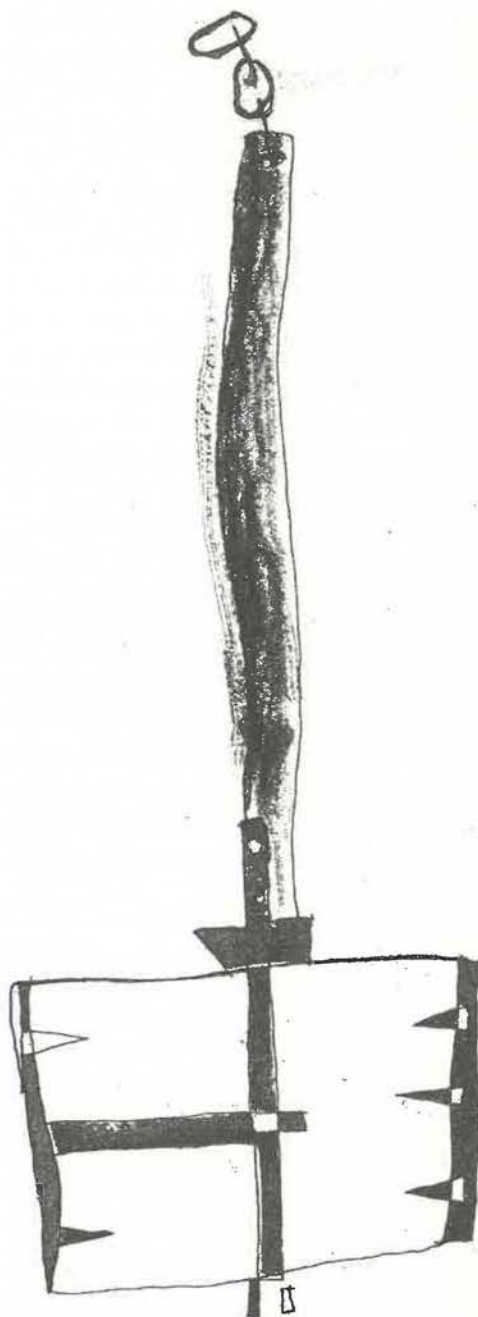
The richness of the Basque dialect that the translator had chosen for his work — the Arrati subdialect — permeates Larrakoetxea's text in a rather overbearing manner, and even more so if we take into account the development and spread of Unified Basque. However, the difficulties that seem to arise in the reception of a Basque translation are due to more than one single factor that has been repeated over and over. Indeed, he embarked on a rather literal translation strategy in which he started with a desire to purify and sift through the language but ended up by throwing more obstacles in its way by overly using *a priori* criteria in the use of place and personal names. In the end, the translator had to translate Shakespeare's play like any other literary language text, not being aware, perhaps, that one day it might have to be performed before an audience. Although seman-

tically faithful, the text being only average stylistically and pragmatically, it was somewhat distant from the average theatre-goer.

Bedita Larrakoetxea's colossal translation work was published by the Kardaberaz Bazkuna printing house in the collection bearing the same name. That publishing house, founded in 1924 in Vitoria-Gasteiz and relaunched in 1970, presented Larrakoetxea's translations to a rather limited number of subscribers and readers in drips and drabs towards the middle of the 1970's and the 37 titles grouped together in comedy, drama, and tragedy came out as volumes 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 in that collection.

If Jean-Louis Curtis, whom we mentioned above, remarked about the difficulties of translating Shakespeare into French by saying that such difficulties arose from the fact that English is richer than French while at the same being more flexible and freer, then in the case of Larrakoetxea's Basque we could say that the greatest obstacles lay in communicating with the receptor and usage of several words — to use Gide's terminology — as well as changing the code in puns because English, especially Elizabethan English, is wonderfully characterized by having a very rich imitative alliteration and sound system.

Moreover, the author is faced squarely with the problem of ad-lib verse singing: should he translate in verse or in prose? Several think that is an artifice to translate English blank verse into a French equivalent and that it runs the risk of robbing the text of its original charm while some others believe that it is a treacherous sin against Shakespeare not to respect the verse/prose dichotomy as it arose from the author himself. In Basque translations, whether in T. Altzaga's or in the



ones later carried out systematically by Larra-koketxea, it is not known whether that problem was ever a question or not, but neither paid much attention to the matter. As Curtis admits, the first duty a playwright has is to captivate and, to that end, being comprehensible is of the utmost importance; indeed, a poetic rhythm is helpful to that end. In some cases, the solution could well be to resort to a flexible, variable verse or a lively rhymed prose. Over all, the Basque verses tend towards the latter although it should be said that such a goal is not always suitably attained.

As he made known in the preface he wrote in the *Macbeth* translation published in *Euzko Gogoia* (1957), he did the Basque translations from the following English version: *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare. Containing the Plays and Poems with special introductory matter, index of characters & glossary of unfamiliar terms. London & Glasgow. Collins Clear-Type Press.*

In the same preface, he says that the language model does not have too many neologisms and archaic expressions, and thus the translation does not pose very great difficulties for the reader.

He states that he stuck steadfastly close to the original, but clearly not when it came to the names of plants where he had to come up with some kind of adaptation. Furthermore, as in the case below, he lets it be known that he was not happy with not having translated a play on words: "If thou couldst, doctor, cast the water of my land, find her disease, and purge it to a sound & pristine health..."

As the translation science expert Curtis acknowledges that modern-day French is not the most suitable for translating Shakespeare's poetry if we compare his work with Ron-

sard, Du Bellay, or Montaigne's, we could likewise say that the Basque literary language will develop into a more suitable tool that will, in the future, prove to be more decanted and amenable to render and convey the numerous echoes of Shakespeare's writings.

That is why in the 1980's, when Basque Television decided to broadcast a series of Shakespearean plays performed for the BBC, the translators and producers had to come up with a new version by bowing to the strident demands of that new Procrustes of the dubbing industry.

The 1980's was a decade that saw the introduction of long-awaited political change that took place long after Franco was dead as well as the beginning of Basque mass media in the Basque Autonomous Community: Basque Television, Basque Radio, and the written media gradually began to make its presence felt when the Basque language newspaper *Euskaldunon Egunkaria* arrived on the scene.

For the first time in the history of Basque culture, movies were dubbed into Basque together with domestically produced fare. Among the products bought wholesale from overseas, Basque Television, among other things, decided to acquire the BBC Shakespearean drama series. These versions began to be shown towards the middle of the decade and they were characterized by being carefully translated, adapted, and dubbed. In some cases, it published translations prior to adapting and dubbing them so that the viewers could read the texts beforehand or could have the text in their hands so that they could follow the performance. Out of the 23 that were translated, dubbed, and broadcast, only half of the dramas made it to publication, to wit: *As you like it*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The*

*Famous History of the Life of King Henry VIII, Julius Caesar, Measure for Measure, Richard II.*⁸

The texts of all of the rest of those that were dubbed and broadcast — altogether, 17 to date — were not published and that is why the translations used to prepare the productions are to be found in the archives of various dubbing studios, i.e., Eresoinka, K 2000, and Edertrack.⁹

Characteristics of the Basque Television versions

In describing the main characteristics of the versions shown on Basque Television, we shall limit ourselves strictly to the published texts since these are the ones we have at our disposal. As for the rest, it should be pointed out that the other texts do not stray very far from those that were published whether it be a question of its translation strategy or the resulting transfer problems arising from having to adapt and dub the works. The model used, as was the usual case during that peri-

od, was the Unified Basque standard which had spread throughout the country by then.

As for the translation, since it was a text that was later to be dubbed and then broadcast on TV, in order for it to reach the highest degree of communicativeness possible and taking into account the difficulties that Shakespeare's discourse posed to the Basque speaker at the end of the 20th century, it comes between the narrow margin allowed by "the bed of Procrustes" for dubbing. In the case of Basque, that difficulty is further complicated in evaluating a language model that is in flux. On the one hand, because it is doubtful and on the other, because the average Basque receptor is essentially attached to his or her dialect or subdialect, not being knowledgeable of the language as a tool fully enjoy in its entirety, despite all the help the video tape might afford.

Xabier Mendiguren, who was the translator of five of the works that were later performed, explicitly poses the problems that

8. According to information gleaned from the archives of Basque Television, the works of Shakespeare translated and dubbed hitherto are the following, but some others are also in the pipeline for translation:

All's well that ends well (Ondo dago ondo amaitzen dena); Anthony and Cleopatra (Antonio eta Kleopatra); As you like it (Zeuk nahi duzunez)*; Cymbeline (Cymbeline); Hamlet (Hamlet); Henry IV (Endrike IV); Henry VIII (Endrike VIII)*; Julius Caesar (Julio Zesar)*; King Lear (Lear Erregea); Macbeth (Macbeth); Measure for Measure (Neurriari neurriaz)*; The Merchant of Venice, (Veneziako Merkataria); The Merry wives of Windsor, (Windsor-eko Emazte Alaiak); A Midsummer Night's Dream, (Ekain-gaueko Ametsa); Othello (Othello); Richard II (Richard II); Romeo and Juliet (Romeo eta Julieta); The Taming of the Shrew, (Piztiaren heziketa); Timon of Athens (Atenasko Timon); The Tragedy of Coriolanus, (Korolanoren Tragedia); A Winter's Tale, (Negu-ipuina).

Works marked by an asterisk (*) were published by *Antzerti* during its existence.

9. *Antzerti*, a magazine published by the Drama Centre of the Basque Government, came out with a collection of theatre works with side-by-side language versions. In 1932, the collection it had begun by publishing Toribio Altzaga's *Aterako gara* come to a halt in 1936 and was relaunched in 1982 to continue with its activities. There are nearly one hundred works altogether in the collection and alongside Basque authors there are others such as Euripides, Humpert, Goldoni, Sastre, Dario Fo, Strindberg, Jean-Paul Sartre, etc.

In 1985, five of W. Shakespeare's works were published with these numbers and titles: no. 73, Julio Zesar; no. 76: Zeuk nahi duzunez; no. 78 Endrike VIII; no. 79 Neurriari neurriaz; no. 82 Richard II. The first four were translated by Xabier Mendiguren while the fifth was translated by Joanes Urkijo and Joxeantonio Sarasola.

Shakespeare's works raise for television and he also makes mention of the obstacles that B. Larrakoetxea had. In the preface to the play *As You Like It*, he tells about the obstacles that the priest's text sometimes had because it was purist, very local or overly literal for a performance whether it be on stage or in a movie or television set. The text is too dense and missing the redundant elements that would facilitate the task of the receptor having to decode the discourse and which had an obvious impact on how an actor said and performed it. It was further exasperated and made difficult by the fact that the phonological and phonetic standard of Unified Basque was still unsure at that time. The translator himself mentioned the fluency, pliant nature, the rhythm, and comprehensibility found in Toribio Alzaga's translation, indeed within the bounds of keeping close to the original, since it eludes the clumsiness and rawness of translations that are too formal by adapting closer to the personality and idiosyncrasies of the target language. His version was aimed at paying even closer attention to Alzaga's model since he believed that although a translation can be rendered academically sound, several versions of that type are usually not able to bring the original setting to the audience, nor is it even able to tell about the life inherent to it.¹⁰

Some conclusions

The encounter of the world of Basque culture with the works of William Shakespeare has fundamentally brought about two rather important matters:

All of Shakespeare's output towards the mid-1970's was what Bedita Larrakoetxea had published whether by Kardaberaz Bazkuna or somewhat earlier in the journal *Euzko Gogoia* which was a limited dissemination of the translations published.

The BBC London version which Basque Television broadcast in which several texts were published opposite each other. Those versions dubbed in Basque and subtitled into Spanish fortunately reached a wider audience; thus it could be deduced that they had a greater impact both for its outstanding quality and for the number of people who followed the programme.

As for the rest, we have not recently have any of Shakespeare's works performed in Basque in the Basque Country recently and thus it could be safely said the English genius has been late in coming, and in very modest circumstances, to the Basque cultural scene and those few readers that managed to read Larrakoetxea's translations and the TV views who saw the BBC versions are about the only ones who have been able to savour him.

Ten years later and the name of Shakespeare is once again heard in Basque letters and this time it is a piece of good news in which a new work of the Swan of Stratford will be available in Basque, that is, in the tradition of Oihanarte and Mirande, Shakespeare's sonnets have been translated by Juan Garzia. However, the translator himself has spoken at great length about the collection of poems at the beginning of the prelude of the translation section in this very issue, and here I conclude without going into the lyrical nature of the drama.

10. Mendiguren, Xabier (1985). SHAKESPEARE, William: Zeuk nahi duzunez. *Antzerki*, 76, p.12.

SYNTHÈSE

L'œuvre théâtrale de William Shakespeare en langue basque

Le traducteur Xabier Mendiguren Bereziartu nous rend compte dans cet article de la traduction en la langue d'Axular de l'œuvre théâtrale de Shakespeare. Il nous parle des traductions elles-mêmes, de leurs caractéristiques et spécificités, ainsi que des traducteurs et du contexte historique et littéraire dans lequel ils ont produit leurs travaux.

Il commence par nous rappeler que cet auteur anglais n'a été traduit en espagnol et en français que très longtemps après sa mort, langues toutes deux, de longue tradition littéraire. C'est précisément cette tradition qui manque à l'euskara (langue basque) dont la production littéraire et poétique moderne ne débute qu'à la fin du XIXe siècle.

Il faut donc attendre la deuxième décennie du XXe siècle pour voir paraître la première traduction d'une œuvre de Shakespeare en basque, de la main de Toribio Alzaga (1861-1941), un des créateurs du théâtre moderne basque, qui traduit *Macbeth*. Il le fait dans le dialecte guipuzcoan bien qu'il emploie des mots d'autres dialectes ainsi que quelques néologismes et suit les règles orthographiques de Arana Goiri. Cette version, à la différence de celles qui lui suivront, est très appropriée pour la mise en scène et touche facilement le spectateur.

Mais c'est au Père Bedita Larrakoetxea (1894-1990) que revient le titre de traducteur de Shakespeare en basque. En effet, il est le premier et le seul à avoir traduit de façon systématique les œuvres complètes du dramaturge anglais et ce, mû par son désir de sortir les lettres basques de la situation de déclin dans laquelle elles se trouvaient en cette période franquiste de l'après-guerre. Les premières traductions, à savoir, *The Tempest* et *Macbeth* apparaissent dans les années cinquante et sont publiées dans la revue *Euzko-Gogoa*. C'est dans les années 70 que sont publiées les traductions de toutes les œuvres théâtrales dans la collection éditée sous le nom de *Kardaberaz Bilduma*. Il utilise le basque de Biscaye et suit de près le texte original au niveau sémantique, mais du point de vue stylistique et pragmatique, il ne réussit pas à communiquer avec le spectateur. C'est pourquoi, lorsque quelques années plus tard la Télévision basque, ETB, décide d'adapter une production de la BBC sur les œuvres de Shakespeare, la version basque de Larrakoetxea s'avère peu appropriée.

Après la mort de Franco, dans les années 80, on assiste dans la Communauté Autonome Basque, à la naissance et l'expansion des médias en euskara : radio, télévision, presse écrite. C'est la première fois que des films sont traduits et la Télévision basque émet une demi-douzaine de pièces théâtrales de Shakespeare des 23 qui avaient été traduites, adaptées et doublées en basque, l'auteur de cet article étant un des principaux traducteurs. Cette nouvelle version se caractérise par son haut degré de communicabilité car, tout en restant fidèle à la langue source, elle s'adapte d'avantage au caractère de la langue cible, parvenant ainsi à un large public.

L'auteur finit son article en soulignant les deux points forts où se rencontrent le monde culturel basque et William Shakespeare, à savoir le travail de traduction de Bedita Larrekoetxea et l'émission en basque par ETB de la version de la BBC. S'il regrette que le génie anglais soit rentré tard et timidement dans la culture basque, il se félicite néanmoins que dix ans plus tard on entende parler du cygne de Stratford dans les lettres basques, à l'occasion de la traduction de son recueil de *Sonnets* par Juan Garzia.

