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BASQUE NICKNAMES AND RELATED ONOMASTIC  
EXAMPLES IN PÍO BAROJA'S NOVELS

Leonard Bloom

Isolated for the most part amid the lofty peaks and spacious valleys of the Pyrenees Mountains, and in the small towns and villages of that corner of southwestern Europe, is a unique ethnic group known as the Basques. Throughout the centuries their origin and inscrutable language have remained mysterious and enigmatic. Scholars in diverse fields of intellectual pursuits, to wit, ethnologists, anthropologists, historians, and particularly linguists have made several attempts, largely futile, to determine valid or substantial information regarding them. The majority of the data which they have formulated have proved to be theoretical and subjective. Nothing positively concrete can yet be said about the beginnings of these people or their idiom. It is interesting to observe that the Basques take particular pride in knowing that they have continued to maintain their unique individuality because of their traditions and language. Moreover, the fact that euskera, the idiom they speak, is as confusing as can be to any linguist, novice or specialist, again gives this proud ethnic race an extra-ordinary delight.

Two fundamental reasons for the enigmatic nature of the Basques are unity and conformity. First, they have unified themselves from

## Bloom 2

generation to generation in a common bond of interest. Centered around strict home life, laboring strenuously on the farms or at fishing for daily sustenance, the Basque has adhered and conformed to the norms of his society. Once breaking all strings and ties from filial bonds by leaving the farm or sea, for instance, to work in industrial or commercial centers around the world, he slowly lost contact with the mores and practices of his culture. Nonetheless, those who remained behind, have had to be resigned to life as tillers of the soil, as shepherds, or as ordinary sea-faring fishermen. It is this group that has preserved steadfastly the traditions of Basque culture and language.

Many celebrated persons of Basque ancestry in the arts and sciences have succeeded in enhancing and strengthening their own cultural heritage. Such notable figures as Loyola, Xavier, Elcano, and in the twentieth century, Unamuno, Maeztu, Baroja, Arceche and others, have undoubtedly given an important name and position to the Basques. Perhaps the most controversial writer of this group is Pío Baroja. His range of interests varies widely from work to work and, as a result of his prolific literary contributions, he is openly criticized from numerous points of view. He is chiefly recognized as a novelist, even though he attempted to compose plays and poetry. Having spent much of his life in the Basque provinces of Spain and France, a large portion of his works have "la tierra vascongada" as

their locale. Consequently, one encounters numerous references to and elements of the Basque race in them. In essence, they never become too weighty, but are depicted casually and with skill and earnestness.

Biographically, San Sebastian, located in the Basque province of Guipúzcoa (Donosti), is the birthplace of this celebrated Spanish novelist. Born on December 28, 1872, he was reared as a child in the house which was constructed for his aunt, doña Concepción Zornoza. Baroja spent the primary years of his life in a Basque environment, not only as a resident of the capital, but as a frequent visitor of neighboring towns and villages. As a child, his autobiography informs us that he always insisted that his father Serafín Baroja recount stories of local and historical personages of Basque history. Important names such as Ochavo, Belarroat, Arruti and Egozcue were often mentioned in the household, and later were adapted into several of his adventure stories. With pen in hand, Baroja's first trilogy was entitled "la tierra vasca" and consisted of these three works: "La casa de Aizgorri," "El mayorazgo de Labraz," and "Zalacaín el aventurero." Like Miguel de Unamuno, his compatriot and contemporary, Baroja studied his people in terms of their character, history, geography and language.

In the dedication to his book entitled "Los vascos," Julio Caro Baroja, nephew of the late novelist, has inscribed justly these sent-

imental and admirable thoughts: "A la memoria de Pío Baroja, cantor del pueblo vasco. En testimonio de amor filial."<sup>1</sup> As a native inhabitant of the Basque provinces of northern Spain with occasional sojourns to similar regions of southwestern France during his long lifetime, Baroja maintained at all times a fervent sensitivity and strong racial attachment to the heritage of his own people. Consequently, his patriotic temperament is clearly manifested in his copious literature, which covers a span of some sixty years, as well as in the everyday habits and routine of this celebrated author of the 20th century. In his novel "La leyenda de Juan de Alzate," Pío sums up this feeling of ethnic pride by asserting:

. . . quiero cantar nuestra comarca en su estado natural y primitivo, y expresar, aunque sea de una manera deficiente y torpe, el encanto y la gracia de esta tierra dulce y amable.<sup>2</sup>

For Baroja, the Basque world represented a unique canvas on which delightful recollections and impressions, both past and present of provincial Basque life, were skillfully depicted. The presence of "Vasconia" is strongly evident in his early works, such as "Vidas sombrías" (1900), even until his final and most monumental work "El país vasco" (1953). Pre-eminent in these works and others of noteworthy importance is the idealization of his homeland. Basque locale and character are painted by Baroja in harmony with a profound sense of loyalty and descriptive realism.

Historical names are often given prominence by Baroja in his novels. In fact, he composed twenty-two volumes of a work entitled

"memorias de un hombre de acción," which deal with Baroja's uncle, Eugenio de Aviraneta. Moreover, throughout his works he made significant references to such patriotic heroes as Loyola, Xavier, Fermín Leguía, Alzate, Sebastián de Elcano, Gastañeta, Oquendo, Iztueta, Vilinch, Iparraguirre, Echevarría, Arteta, Zuloaga, Zubiaurre, and others. Throughout the gamut of Basque history, these noteworthy figures have clearly brought importance and fame to themselves as well as to their own ethnic race. Since they represent, in part, a representative assemblage of historical names of the land, one may assert that they have contributed to the backbone and eminence of "el pueblo vasco." Baroja was particularly interested in the adventurers and heroes of the Carlist wars that ravaged much of Spain during the 19th century. In such a work as "nuevo tablado de Arlequin," Baroja points out such names as Fraschu, Belcha y Chango, Egozcue, Lushia, Gastelu, and so forth. Once in a while, Baroja will offer an etymological interpretation of a Basque name, such as he does of the word Alzate, in "La leyenda de Juan de Alzate":

Alzate, en vascuence, quiere decir abundancia de alisos y el aliso es un árbol mágico en la mitología centro-europea. Del aliso procede la mujer, como el hombre prodcede del fresno. Contra esta etimología alisal se pronuncia un amigo vascófilo que la palabra vasca, alza, alça, debía representar primitivamente la idea genérica del árbol, como la sanscrita alka, muy semejante a ella, significa también el árbol, en general, y entonces Alzate valdría tanto como abundancia de árboles o arboleda.<sup>3</sup>

As in the case of other Basque heroes of former times, including

Legazpi, Lezo, Buenaeschea and others, Baroja claimed that he mentioned their names in his works because little was known regarding the true history of each of these men; many of their exploits were not put down in writing nor were they annotated by historians at the time. Even though in his novels one may trace several recurrent elements of history, particularly the names of Basque personalities, Baroja neither considered himself a historian nor was his intention to be one. He was basically concerned with extracting human figures, incidents, and places of historical import as background source material for his works.

Several of Baroja's novels contain folkloric elements indigenous to his race which he incorporates therein to denote supernatural phenomena describing legends about witches, ghosts, goblins, eery caves, and the like, all of which have been handed down from generation to generation among the Basques. Consequently, references are made to certain fantasmogoric names such as the "lamias" or monstrous creatures which were observed by ancient Basques as gods, although their origin was not attributed to the Basque country. In one novel, the above-cited "Nuevo tablado de Arlequin," Baroja states "En Vera hay un arroyo que se llama Lamiocingo-erreca (i.e. stream of the chasm of the lamias), un alto que se denomina Lamiaco, y a orillas del Bidasoa se encuentra un caserío que se llama lami-arri (i.e. lamia's stone.)"<sup>4</sup> In "La leyenda de Juan de Alzate," one of the principle characters is

a devil styled Chiqui, while in "El caballero de Erlaiz," Baroja narrates an account concerning his friend Izquina's interests in the art of witchcraft, in which he talks about the Baso-Juan (i.e. man of the forest) and a hunter priest called Eiztarri-Beltz (i.e. black hunter). Likewise, in "Las inquietudes de Shanti Andía," reference is made to the serpent with wings called Egan-suguia. According to Baroja, this serpent has tiger claws, wings of a buzzard and the face of an old lady. A final aspect of supernatural terminology employed by Baroja in his novels bears important historical significance. During the seventeenth century, a mysterious sect which practiced the art of necromancy migrated into the Basque country, and was given the name Sorguina, a term meaning "witch" to these people and still heard from the mouths of Basque storytellers. In his "Fantasías vascas," an early collection of short stories, Baroja relates:

. . .en el país vasco existía un culto en donde la mujer era sacerdotisa: La Sorguina. En las dos vertientes del Pirineo vasco . . .las hechiceras imperaban, manaban, curaban y hacían sortilegios.<sup>5</sup>

Lastly, the ancient word used by Basques for Supreme Being was Urtzi Thor, thor taken from the Scandinavian. The French-Basques, according to Baroja in "El país vasco" used the name Besoncia:

. . .A Deo Tulonio, deidad ibérica, del la que quedaba una inscripción cerca de Vitoria, a las Garobetarrac, deidades forestales. Urtzi era el cielo, la tierra y el agua circundante. Illargui o Arguizeria, la Luna, la hecedora de la luz o el dios luz.<sup>6</sup>

Nowadays, Jaungoikoa is the most commonly used Basque term for God. However, Baroja argues that "la palabra Jaungoikoa no es una forma primitiva de denominar a Dios y debe ser una adaptación de la idea católica y latina de la divinidad."<sup>7</sup> "Sea el señor de arriba o el señor de las vacas, como creen algunos, no el antiguo en el país, es un advenedizo, un etor quina (i.e., recent arrival)."<sup>8</sup>

It is of extraordinary interest in the study of Basque culture as seen in Baroja's literature, to observe the tendency of the Basques, as he exhorts, to employ very often nicknames, rather than their Christian names, with strange connotations. Although this seems to be a universal trait, it takes on a special meaning in "El pueblo vasco." In numerous works of Baroja, the novelist replaces the given name of a character by using his nickname or Spanish "apodo." Descriptive names, such as "Mandashay Erua" or "the mad muleteer," "Oquerra" or the "cross-eyed one", "Shucalde" or the "kitchen" ('for he loved to eat and drink'), "Cashcarin" or "simpleton" are typical examples among countless ones, that one encounters, for example, in his novel "La familia de Errotacho." In addition one may discover nicknames like "Ganish" and "Bertache" in "El amor, el dandismo y la intriga," "Chipiteguy" in "Las figuras de cera," and others throughout his fecund literature. The significance and use of these nicknames stem from the strong individualistic behavior of the Basques, which Baroja so ably points out in this note:

Llamaba a las personas por sus apodos, cosa que siempre divierte en una capital de provincia dõnde se conoce a todo el mundo. Estos apodos se repiten de generaci3n en generaci3n y parecen siempre nuevos.<sup>9</sup>

To this day, in the Basque country, nicknames are applied more frequently to designate a specific characteristic, physical or otherwise, of a person. In fact, to be called by one's nickname is a sign of greater acceptance among people of all ages, particularly males, than is any other denomination. Basques prefer nicknames as an indication of a unique personality.

Other onomastic references found in Baroja's novels concern musical terminology, since music plays such a vital role in the life style and history of the Basque people. For instance, Dithurbide, a "vasco-francés" in the work "Idilios y fantasías" is a "charcutero," or ex-singer, who enjoyed singing such popular French-Basque songs as the Charmangarria, the Usochuria, and the Montagnard, among others. Adrián Erláiz, in "El caballero de Erláiz," is extremely fond of dancing the "escu dantza" or "baile de mano" (that is, hand dance) in addition to the "guizon dantza" or "baile de hombres" (the dance of men) to the music of a minuet known in Basque as alcatosõua, accompanied by the "chistu" or short flute, and the "tamboril" or little drum. In short, Baroja was an ardent admirer and observer of the fine arts and music. In his novels, the reader frequently encounters occasions in which Baroja describes and annotates in full, several regional songs, poems, expressions, and so

forth. Generally, these elements give an extra spice and flamboyance to a story, and at the same time, they reflect the author's extraordinary sentiments regarding Basque culture and language. In addition, the aesthetic qualities of the various features of music and art are illustrated with a remarkable stroke of the pen.

References to euskera or the Basque language appear in the most natural way from time to time in the works of Pío Baroja. He often included phrases, poetic strophes, entire songs, and particular nicknames in the enigmatic tongue of his people. The purpose, in general, was to present the reader with a first-hand view of the idiom as well as permit him the opportunity to penetrate and investigate the unique and inscrutable nature of the Basques with reference to their difficult language and dialects. These phrases and strophes never become the preponderant feature of any one work, but merely add a little color and afford occasional relaxation from the Castilian employed by the novelist. Sometimes Baroja would pen Basque names only because their Castilian counterparts would not connote the exact feeling or offer a veritable translation of a particular trait of that individual. For those who might want to read what Baroja himself conceived about the origin of "vascuence" and its dubious relationship to any other spoken tongue heard today anywhere in the world, the author adduced in "Familia, infancia y juventud" the following:

Con relación al idioma, el vasco debió ser el resto del substratum de una lengua ya mezclada anteriormente a la expansión de las tribus indoeuropeas y que tiene elementos filológicos caucásicos e ibéricos.<sup>10</sup>

In a word, Baroja takes into account the presumption of linguists and ethnologists who assert that "es precedente o emparentada con el finés y las lenguas uralaltaicas."<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the true origin of the Basque language remains nowadays as it did for past generations, a scholarly puzzle worthy yet of future investigation. As one might expect, Baroja realized the innate pride and sense of dignity which the Basque has maintained for centuries in connection with his unique language. Because of its complexity and certainly extreme difficulty to learn, much less to master, the Basque has always maintained an intense degree of superiority of possessing a language that is little known to outsiders of the Basque country. To clarify this point of ethnic vainglory, Baroja records a conversation in "La veleta de Gastizar" between two characters, Miguel Aristy and a cousin, who at one point are found discussing their viewpoints on the subject of the distinction between a patois and the Basque language. The dialogue proceeds as follows:

---No comprendo cómo se habla el patois -- decía Miguel a su prima.

---¿Por qué no?

---Es como tener do trajes para la ciudad. Nosotros los vascos, no; tenemos el traje de pastor, de la aldea: el vascuence; y el de la ciudad, el francés.

---Nosotros no tenemos nada de pastores -- replicaba ella --; somos más civilizados.

---Un idioma latino. ¡Psch! ¡Que cosa mas ridicula! --exclamaba Miguel.

---Ustedes han resultado que hay una superioridad de los vascos sobre los bearneses y los gascones, y ya basta.

--- ¡Ah, claro! Es una superioridad que no necesita explicación.<sup>12</sup>

Baroja denotes and projects melancholic thoughts in his works about maintaining and teaching the language in whatever way possible. If he were alive in 1976 he would certainly be proud of the "ikastolas" or Basque schools presently sanctioned by the Spanish government to provide teachers and classes for the instruction of euskera. Although he was not totally fluent in the language, he himself essayed all possible means to introduce Basque heritage through it in his novels. In a short work titled "El vascuence" he expresses his viewpoint regarding euskera to a time in the future when the Basque language may become completely extinct.

He writes:

al morir el vascuence, sin honra alguna para la patria, sin favorecer en nada el desarrollo del pensamiento, desaparecera un matiz pintoresco de la Península, un nota más, simpática y amable, de la vieja España, que, suguiendo este camino, ilegara a ser el país mas uniforme y monótono del mundo.<sup>13</sup>

In conclusion, as a distinct ethnic group inhabiting a comparatively small area of Europe, the Basques have been fortunate in presenting to the outside world. as well as to it own, several

outstanding men of letters. One such individual was Pió Baroja. Although Baroja composed his literary works in the Spanish language, with occasional interpolated words or phrases in Basque, the author at all time maintained a fervent affinity with the mores and traditions, in addition to the idiom, of his native people. He succeeded in doing so through daily conversations with town and country folk resulting from extensive journeys throughout "el país vasco," in search of cultural and historical data regarding the Basques. Consequently, by studying his numerous works, which total more than 100 novels, the over-all nature of the Basque emerges in clear perspective. With particular reference to his use of names, be they proper, historical, geographical or otherwise in his works, Baroja employed nomenclature that could identify a specific aspect of character in an individual, set against the background of the Basque countryside. This does not mean that all of his literary output deals with a Basque theme, but in most of his works, a Basque personage, who for him typifies a wanderer or dreamer, can be found engaging in his society on either a major or minor scale. Concerned very much for realism, Baroja includes the names of characters and geographical locations because he personally knew them, could identify easily with them, and consequently he gave the greatest credence to his stories by their inclusion. He was not one concerned with elements outside his own regional grasp. Like the importance of the nickname

in Basque society, don Pío's tendency to write in a language with relative spontaneity earmarked his choice of words to describe the Basque, at least in one substantial regard, as the most vigorous, individualistic personality on this universe.

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NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Julio Caro Baroja, Los vascos (Madrid: Ediciones Minotauro, 1958), p.6.
- <sup>2</sup>Pío Baroja, La leyenda de Juan de Alzate (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe Argentina, S.A., 1947), p. 14.
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 12.
- <sup>4</sup>-----, Nuevo tablado de Arlequín (Madrid: Editorial Rafael Caro Raggio, 1917), p. 134.
- <sup>5</sup>-----, Fantasías vascas (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe Argentina, S.A., 1952), p. 105.
- <sup>6</sup>-----, El país vasco (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, S.L., 1953), p. 36.
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 37.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 472.
- <sup>9</sup>-----, La sensualidad pervertida (Madrid: Editorial Rafael Caro Raggio, 1917), pp. 96 - 97.
- <sup>10</sup>-----, Familia, infancia y juventud (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1944), p. 14.
- <sup>11</sup>-----, El país vasco, p. 27.
- <sup>12</sup>-----, "La valeta de Gastizar," Obras completas, III (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1948), p. 887.
- <sup>13</sup>-----, Familia, infancia y juventud, p. 14.