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Abstract

Review of Iker Gonzalez-Allende. El Exilio Vasco. Estudios en homenaje al Profesor José Ángel Ascunce Arrieta. Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 2016.

Keywords

Exilio, Literatura, Teatro, País Vasco, Diáspora

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“[L]os exiliados de verdad . . . por un ideal y por un compromiso realizaron en tierras extrañas a su idioma y a su cultura una labor realmente utópica, casi absurda . . . La pluralidad y la heterogeneidad definen al pueblo vasco y también al exilio vasco.” (52)

‘True exiles . . . for aspiration or commitment, carry out in lands foreign to their own language and culture, a truly utopic labor, almost absurd . . . plurality and heterogeneity define the Basque community and Basque exile.’

This volume of essays considers a variety of contributions concerning the topic of Basque exile, with special attention to the themes and problems that Dr. José Angel Ascunce Arrieta has been exploring throughout his career. It represents a welcome addition to the library of Universidad de Deusto and to the literature that examines the Basque diaspora in general. The first chapter addresses an extended interview with Dr. Ascunce, conducted by the editor Dr. Iker González Allende, which summarizes the direction of this volume: a series of papers discussing literature, theater, and poetry production, and the inclusion of these contributions within the scope of Basque exile in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (11).

While this volume focuses on Basque exile, one of its strengths is the wide range of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary works that it manages to bring together. The reader is able to observe the many ways in which writers, poets, and authors perceived a historical moment that would change their entire lives. Yet the narrative is not narrowed exclusively to the Basque case, but rather relates it more generally to the broader context of Spanish exile. Thus, the volume expands on the idea of exile as a multifaceted category that, in the case of the Basque migration movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was intermingled with nationalist and republican exile. Accordingly, the different authors featured in the volume highlight this diversity of reasons to migrate—political, social, economic—and the imprint of these reasons on their works.

The essays are not ordered chronologically, but rather follow a more arbitrary order divided into two main blocks (first General Studies, then Authors and Works in Basque Exile), which creates an interesting effect in the consideration of exile as a multifaceted category. Ascunce’s introduction and bibliography provide a valuable context to the volume and frame the idea of a rich and diverse Basque exile in America. In chapter 1, González-Allende conducts an interview with Ascunce, which allows the reader to delve into the wide variety of topics that this outstanding scholar has researched during his career. This first chapter creates

an anchor effect that helps the reader understand many notions and concepts that will appear throughout the volume. In chapter 2, Mercedes Acillona López connects the spatiality of Basque boarding houses to notions of utopia and freedom. However, some of the arguments do not compensate for the vagueness of the chapter, due in part to a lack of specific references to the Basque boarding houses to which the author refers. In chapter 3, Jose Ramón Zabala Agirre explores the reality of a banned language and its blossoming during exile. This chapter explains the special circumstances where Basque literary production thrived and how exile contributed to this success. In chapter 4, Mari Karmen Gil Fombellida gives a brilliant account of how Basque theater companies developed during their exile, exposing the difficulties and successes that these companies experienced overseas. In chapter 5, Arantzazu Ametzaga and Xabier Irujo depict the image of Gernika when it was bombed, from the perspective and distance of exile, creating an almost cinematic deep-focus effect in their narration of the infamous event. In chapter 6, Victoria María Sueiro Rodríguez gives a relevant account of how Cuba welcomed Basque exiles within their universities and higher education programs.

In chapter 7, Manuel Aznar Soler examines Cecilia G. de Guilarte's work "Los nudos del quipu" ("The Nods of Quipu," where *quipu* also means nod in Quechua) to explain the nuanced connections between Republican exile and the national identity of the Basque exiles. In chapter 8, Rosa Fernández Urtasun discusses the work of Ernestina de Champoucin as one of the major contributions to Mexican literature made by a Basque exile. In chapter 9, Mónica Jato uses the work of María Luisa Elío to explain how traumas can also be the main source of creativity and literary excellence, as was the case for this particular Basque woman who began to write upon her return from exile (as a "*retornada*"). In chapter 10, María Teresa González de Garay presents the otherwise forgotten figure of Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, an outstanding scholar who profoundly understood the opportunities and challenges that American institutions could offer in relation to the research and diffusion of Basque culture. In chapter 11, Larraitz Ariznabarreta Garabieta envisions exile in an interesting way as a dwelling place for one of the most notorious Basque authors, the journalist Martin Ugalde, who elaborated his work with and without a reference of *home*. In chapter 12, Veronica Azcue discusses the parameters of the dramatization of art in the work of José Martín Elizondo. In chapter 13, Ramon Emilio Mandado Gutiérrez presents the figure of Eugenio Imaz, a Basque philosopher whose work developed mainly as a result of the diaspora and his connections to contemporary thinkers. In chapter 14, Ana González Neira presents the contributions made by journalist Juan Larrea in "*Cuadernos Americanos*" 'American Notebooks,' examining the role that this publication had in the diaspora. In chapter 15, Ricardo Tejada revisits the figure of Juan Larrea from a more analytical and philosophical angle. In chapter 16,

Alexander Jiménez Matarrita explores the figure of the Basque-Costa Rican philosopher Teodoro Olarte and his contributions to the journal “Idearium.”

The structure of the volume itself, divided into segments, helps the reader understand the main thesis of the work: that examining the Basque exile through the cultural and intellectual production of the people who experienced it reveals it to be a heterogeneous and complex phenomenon beyond the nationalist vision, thereby enabling a different view of the consequences and aftermath of the Civil War in Spain. The volume also unveils the importance of certain literary and intellectual figures that remain unfamiliar to the general Basque audience, thereby drawing attention to these individuals using the homage to Dr. Ascunce as the narrative frame. Thus, this volume provides a valuable contribution to our understanding of Basque exile and the multiplicity of this phenomenon. Perhaps most significantly, this volume shows the importance and relevance of the intellectual production achieved in exile, despite severe and potentially limiting circumstances.

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