

Dear mr. Julian Barnes,

I wanted to write to you to express my great admiration for your work and in the hope that you might take a little interest in a project that I am working on. I trust that you will forgive me for being so bold. But first of all, let me introduce myself: My name is Anjel Lertxundi and I write mainly in Basque, which is one of the official languages of the Basque Country. This year has seen the European Capital of Culture initiative arrive in both Wroclaw in Poland and San Sebastian, and I would like to invite you to the latter to attend a meeting for selected writers and translators.

I live in a bilingual country and I write in the non-hegemonic language of the region. I have always been curious as to how this kind of situation can affect writing in literary terms —reduced literary tradition, diglossia, lack of official recognition for centuries, doubts as to whether the language will actually survive... I will always remember what Gombrowicz speculated in a letter to Czeslaw Milosz some years ago. When talking to Milosz about the future of Polish literature, Gombrowicz wrote: “In a hundred years, if our language still exists ...” If these are the words of an author from Poland, a country with a rich literary tradition, what would a writer who expresses themselves in Basque, for example, have to say? I am writing to you in a dying language. Does that make me a dying writer? In my opinion, one of the most authentic contributions that those of us who are involved in this situation can make to literature is to free ourselves from that cycle of cause and effect. Given that writing is rooted in a specific language, it is virtually inevitable that the future of Basque is something which occupies a special place among my literary concerns and ideas.

At this point, I would like to explain the reason for my letter; even though you write in a language which has a strong literary tradition, I would like to ask you to imagine yourself as a writer who works in a language with a limited literary tradition. To what extent do you think your outlook would be affected by a limited literary tradition? How do you think you would approach concepts such as literary models, tradition or canons? Giorgos Seferis had this to say about writing in a non-hegemonic language (modern Greek in his case): “It gives us the option to renew our joyful language; we had to have some advantage over literatures that have

been cultivated time and again...". What is your view of the option —and fortune— mentioned by Seferis? Ultimately, what do you think about the fact that literatures which feel as if their expiry date is drawing nearer want to keep swimming in the waters of globalisation?

This is an issue which receives little attention, but I am convinced that it is and will be of vital importance in our world as it becomes increasingly globalised. What I would like to ask is this: that you come to our city to discuss this issue, dedicate a small amount of your time to this topic and then outline your views in a short text which is approximately ten pages in length. This could take the form of an essay or any other format you wish. You would not be alone in this endeavour. We have also invited other authors who write in the hegemonic languages that surround us to take part (Alessandro Baricco, Marie Darrieussecq, Javier Cercas...), as well as translators including Adam Kovacics, Miguel Sáez, Karlos Cid...

I have waffled on too long. You have shown tremendous patience by reading this far. I would sincerely like to thank you for your time and your respect.

In the hope that we can meet in San Sebastian, please accept my warmest wishes.

Anjel Lertxundi.