

***Paper by Xurxo Borrazás, delivered at the National
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I come from a strange country to talk about a strange literature. And I am going to talk about my country and about our literature, entirely in the belief that many of the things I am about to say here in Mold will ring a bell to you, as if Galicia and Wales were two siblings who have not seen each other since they were babies. Then, the moment they meet, they intuit they have something in common, that there are landscapes that are vaguely reminiscent to both of them, memories that seem like dreams...

If expressed in this fashion, it all sounds highly poetic, almost magical. But let me tell you that I am not one who normally has esoteric inclinations, and I believe that the similarities between our two countries do not spring from a kind of magical déjà vu, but from historical, political and social circumstances that are either shared or one and the same.

Let me tell you about one occasion in which my wife and I were playing with our baby on the beach. He had made friends with a little girl while playing and my wife was talking to both of them. After a short while the girl, of about three years of age, asked my wife what was wrong with her mouth. My wife was speaking in Galician in Galicia, that's what was wrong with her mouth. Well, then, that's the kind of country I come from.

Every literary system springs from and develops around a language, *basically* from and around a language, although not always. Austrian or Canadian literature, for instance, share their languages with other large literary systems, they exist in their shadow and accept this as their lot. Sometimes they search for a type of support or underpinnings other than just the language for the construction of their own national literature, or assimilate themselves directly to the most powerful system and try to mimic its ways. However, in those cases where literary systems have their own language, the fate of that language and that one of the literature that derives from it become inseparable. This is what happens in Galicia, and I guess the situation is not too different here in Wales.

Your country and mine share yet another circumstance: saying only that we have our own language would be saying too little, for also Denmark, the Czech Republic or Bulgaria have their own language too. We have our own language but we do not have a State, and as a consequence our language is a minority language or a “minoritised” language. This fact is as important as having our own language.

The languages of our countries, which is our people’s most decisive collective creation throughout history, is today assumed as our own only by a fraction of society, and in the Galician case this fraction is shrinking in size. Our own language is not considered by the majority of the people as an element of pride or prestige, as a positive emotional value or as patrimonial wealth, just like nature, architecture, music, gastronomy or specific celebrations or festivities can be.

In our countries, the readership to which literary works are addressed does not coincide with the bulk of the population, only with a variable part of it. And whether the reader belongs to the group who ignore or spoil our linguistic patrimony or to the group of those who actively

contribute to its preservation, the reading that people will do of the novels and the poems written in that minoritised language will always be full of prejudices, vitiated. Our literary works will always be subject to a double act of reading: one on artistic terms, one on political ones.

This sort of poisoned environment does not only affect the readers. Perhaps it affects the writers to a greater extent, because we live always with a foot in both camps, constantly wondering whether what we are doing is good enough, trying to take into account both aesthetic and emotional factors, while simultaneously trying to determine whether what we're doing is "Galician enough". It is as if this big question had been forged on our foreheads: In what way is my book contributing to our national identity? How is my work helping Galician literature move forward?

Our hands are burning while we, Galician writers type away on our keyboards. We are forever running the risk of committing ourselves to the hell of pamphlets, or to the limbo of anonymity. Heaven is out of the question for us.

Obviously, this is a pernicious state of things. The ideal scenario would be that writers would create their work in freedom, just like Icelanders or Greeks, like English or Spanish writers who do not know any other language but English or Spanish. Whoever has to be watchful of too many aspects of their work, ends up not really excelling in any of them.

We Galician writers, are aware for this reason that we're always going to be on the losing side, as if we were taking part in a race with our feet tied and our eyes blindfolded. If our texts focus on the linguistic conflict and political dependence, they end up being somewhat disfigured, as if they had a hump. If on the contrary we ignore such conflicts, our works end up being equally disfigured, as if they were missing an arm or a leg.

Our position will always be one of inferiority, compared to those whose backs are straight and have well-proportioned limbs.

So what to do then? Should we assume that we are a minority on its way to extinction and that our work is only for internal consumption? A kind of fateful second division, forever below the superpower languages in the premier league, with no right to be promoted? Is our poetry only a painkiller for the terminally ill?

Or should we go on doing what we do as if we were a normal country, with neither diglossia nor identity conflicts, trusting that if we close our eyes and repeat our wishes as a sort of hypnotic mantra, those wishes will end up becoming true?

Reality is a stubborn thing and the trouble is that sooner or later we are going to have to open our eyes, the clock in palace will finally strike twelve and no fairy godmother, no prince charming will come with a glass shoe to rescue us from among the brooms and the kitchen pots.

Which course of action is more convenient for the dominated, be it Cinderella or a stateless nation? To turn our backs on the situation, to remain silent and hope that it all finishes as soon as possible? To leave this state of slavery as our legacy to our children and trust that all this suffering will pay off in the after life? Or would it be better to keep our eyes wide open and confront the brooms and the stepmother and the ghosts that paralyse us, even though we may suffer for this. Is it possible to choose? Of course these two options, resistance and acceptance, are not symmetrical, and only one of them, resistance, allows us to maintain our dignity.

We should tell the stepmother and her daughters, tell them loud and clear, that the house in which they live is OUR house and that they

either share the workload or else they might as well start searching for a prince charming that maintains them if they can find him.

For Galicia-Cinderella, the good and generous father, the one who symbolises normality and that kind of Eden-like, or oedipal happiness, which preceded the arrival of the stepmother, to continue with the metaphor, were the Middle Ages. Or let us better say: the Galicia of the Middle Ages was the dead mother of Cinderella. Portugal would be her father, a father who neglected us a bit and searched for other relations with our stepmother, Spain. When marriages break up, it is a well-known fact that it's always the children that suffer the most.

The Middle Ages, the 13th and 14th Centuries in particular, were the time of greatest splendour for our language and our literature. From that point onwards, a period of decadence began which we are still undergoing today.

In that time, the country was monolingual: documents, laws, chronicles, the Church and literature were expressed through the medium of Galician. And not only that, also some foreign authors would use the language. Even a certain Castilian king did so, and not any old king but king Alfonso X the Wise, the creator of Toledo's School of Translators and the promoter of a harmonious coexistence among the Christian, Jewish and Muslim cultures. He would write his lyrical poems in Galician. Galicia was in vogue and political power was administrated by the Galicians. As a consequence, our language and culture were considered prestigious, a prestige which was strengthened by our contact with other European influences through the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. In that time, the language spoken by those who rowed was the same language as that of the boat captains.

Paradoxically, the arrival of printing brought about the disappearance of our literature. This seeming contradiction was not a fortuitous one,

neither a mysterious fact nor a self-destructive gesture from a melancholic people with a suicidal vocation. In that time, a series of events took place which explain this:

First, the “Irmandiña” Revolution, which culminated in the destruction of dozens of aristocratic fortresses, practically all of them in Galicia, and ONLY in Galicia, by means of a wide popular protest. This insurgent uprising, specifically Galician, made the militarily more powerful reigns of Castile look at our country with a degree of suspicion and resentment.

Soon afterwards, when the Galician nobility supported Xoana in the dynastic wars for the Castilian throne, against who was to become Queen Isabel the Catholic, the latter was to exact revenge on Galicia by means of a process that was to be termed “the taming and castration” of Galicia. This process included measures such as removing Galician subjects from those spheres of power such as the administration and ecclesiastic elites, and replacing them with Castilian people. By doing so, decision making processes were taken away from Galicians and put in the hands of our stepmother Castile: our institutions were wiped out and all Galician cultural expressions were prohibited. To all intents and purposes, Galicia turned into a Castilian colony, just like any other territory overseas, and thus began a historical period later to be called “the Dark Centuries”.

It was not until the 18th Century, during the period of the European Age of Enlightenment, that the slow recovery of our dignity began. This process, timid and fitful, was initiated by the only section of society that could have afforded to hold certain claims and be tolerated: the Church, especially in the person of the monk Martín Sarmiento, who from a humanistic point of view, denounced the treatment that Galicia was receiving as a colonised land and which was keeping its people in extreme poverty. He also demanded the validity of the Galician

language, the one which was still widely spoken by the lower classes, as the language also to be used at schools.

At the same time, other Enlightened thinkers, attuned to the spirit of progress of that century in Europe, argued in favour of the devolution of the country's historical institutions, as well as those implemented by the Spanish state, to Galician hands, using both practical and technical arguments.

Even so, by the middle of the 19th Century, when the so-called "provincialist movement" demanded the re-establishment of a degree of political autonomy, its leaders were executed. But during the 19th-century, Spanish governments fluctuated between absolutism and liberalism, which allowed for the emergence of the cultural movement known as "Rexurdimento" (Re-emergence) towards the end of the century. This was a decisive turn for our letters, which yielded such important figures as the Galician woman poet Rosalía de Castro, today considered without the shadow of a doubt our best poet: our national poet.

Rosalía's personality and her work perfectly symbolise the literary, social and political situation of her time: a culture heavily dependent upon the Spanish one. In her books written in Castilian, the kind of preoccupations she expressed were more personal and culture-oriented. By contrast, in her collections of poems written in Galician, her call for social justice and the dignity of our culture was ever-so firm. The re-emergence movement she was a harbinger for was never to subside in the next hundred years, but for the presence of repression.

The problem was that the damage had already been done and this demand for justice and dignity no longer sprang from the lower classes, who were now terrorised by the domination and repression of the Spanish institutions, but came instead from the cultural elites. It was highly positive that these elites took action and engaged with the situation, but this was not enough. The central State allowed for a

certain degree of progress in the realm of culture but was significantly more reluctant to concede political rights.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, nationalist movements and initiatives mushroomed in Galicia: the Irmandades da Fala (Brotherhoods of the Language), the Agrarian movement, the Nós generation (Us-Generation), the Galeguista political party (Galicianist Party), etc. They all represented a series of political and cultural vindications. Poetry continued to be written, avant-garde cultural manifestations were timidly introduced and essays and novels began to be written in Galician: the cultural scene, even when limited to the scope of action of the elites, was again and since the Middle Ages in the hands of the Galicians. The lower layers of society, however, dramatically impoverished and illiterate, did not participate in this moment of cultural renewal, which made it a slightly artificial event.

Let us remember that the members of the *Nós* generation (“Us” Generation) translated Joyce into Galician, read German and French philosophy, while 80% of the population did not even go to school.

The culmination of the progress made by these nationalist initiatives took shape in the years of the Second Republic and were symbolised in the second most important figure of our contemporary history: Daniel Castelao: a writer, painter and politician who took the leading role in the drafting of the first Statute of Autonomy for Galicia in the 1930s.

It was precisely at this climatic moment, when the highest degree of collective dignity had been achieved, that the Spanish Civil War broke out. The dictatorship did much more than simply putting the brake on the process of self-autonomy: it meant a return to the times and conditions that had been imposed upon us by the catholic kings in the Middle Ages. The repression and prohibition of anything that would smell of Galician or of any type of claim, however mild, was brutal. The

fear of being assassinated or executed paralysed society and all the progress that had been made during the previous hundred years and up to that moment was lost.

For those of us who were born after this moment, Galicia had disappeared, except as a merely geographical concept. And even at that level, fascism changed all the place names. They wiped out our history. For years and years Galicia only survived in exile, outside itself.

From the 50s onwards, a further event took place which was yet another nail in Galicia's coffin: the exodus en mass of our rural population to America, the countries of Central Europe, Barcelona or the Basque Country. Also within Galicia itself, many people moved from the villages to the cities. Only in seventy years, the rural population has gone down from being the 80% of the whole population to being the 20%!

The rural environment had been for centuries and through the times of severe repression a kind of linguistic reserve of Galician speakers. It was across Galician towns and cities, however, that Castilian was gradually imposed, because it was in the cities that the institutional administration was largely based and where popular control was easier to manage. Thus the law of silence and self-hatred installed itself in the urban context, even across the lower classes.

As I said at the beginning, I believe a direct link can be established between language and literature, just like between a river and its river bed. It is through this metaphor that perhaps one can understand the sheer magnitude of the loss that literature underwent simultaneously with the shrinking of the rural population and the subsequent disappearance of traditional culture: traditional trades, leisurely activities, games, the all-present nature of the Church, the relationship between people and food, economic exchanges, means of transport, ways of courtship, families and the relationships among its members,

popular architecture, the replacement of verbal agreements with legal contracts, etc...

All those things that were emblematic for the Galicians living seventy years ago have disappeared or lost their character: the outdoor market has been replaced by the shopping mall, the Church is now an excuse for the elderly to get out a bit and stretch their legs, the village festivities only mean traffic jams which fill the working-classes' weekend, the space and significance of the hearth in the kitchen is now occupied by the telly; the wheat mills, which had once been the origin of thousands of saucy refrains and poems, do not exist anymore; the same has happened with the blacksmith's, the collective bread ovens, or the spinning mills. Along with them disappeared the idioms, the popular tunes, the tales to be told around the fire: popular culture was reduced to an anthropological act, hiding in the books and far removed from everyday life. Even worse, it's become a tourist lure for those visiting the region. Or even worse still, a tourist attraction for the Galician themselves! It can now be understood that the loss for Galicia has been irrecoverable.

It was in this context, during the dictatorship and the gradual loss of traditional lifestyles, that some Galician intellectuals who had remained in the country, those who hadn't been able to go into exile or hadn't wanted to, tried to rear their heads in the 50s. But before that they had to give evidence of their adherence to the fascist regime, or at least demonstrate their harmlessness somehow. Fifteen years had elapsed without a single Galician book being published and when they were in fact allowed to write in Galician, they could only write about nature, popular religion, or in order to express a kind of melancholy for the loss of life and other times past.

These defeated intellectuals created a cultural corpus which rested on a sad and tired notion of Galicia, a notion which still persists in our literature today to a great extent. Several decades had to go by before a

new urban literature, free from an old-fashioned 19th-century-like spirituality could appear, but this new literature also had to face up to its own obstacles, for instance the obstacle of not encountering a real receiving readership, neither among the Castilian-speaking urban population nor in the rural population which had moved to the cities, which still had a foot set in the village and keep themselves on the margins of urban fads. The number of Galician speakers was still decreasing and culture became more than ever an elitist affair.

With the arrival of democracy in the late 70s, these tendencies settled even more: the loss of Galician speakers became sharper while the number of publications in Galician and cultural activities increased exponentially. During these years, the job was undertaken of providing the language with a standard norm. And what happened? The phonetic, syntactic and orthographic referents that were chosen were those of Castilian, with the effect that the resulting norm was alien to the people's speech. The majority of Galician speakers became convinced that, if the real Galician was the one reflected in that new norm, then they couldn't really speak Galician. This fact demonstrates that the norm created at the time was a failure.

We all know that the preservation of a species is an extremely difficult matter when their natural habitat is being destroyed. The mammals in the zoo do not want to procreate and they'd rather dream their time away and become extinct in a kind of passive resistance. Our language today is a kind of endangered species, an animal in the zoo. Of course, we can't expect to be able to reconstruct the traditional natural habitat, but this is not necessary either: a language is a tool, not a living being, and it adapts itself to all sorts of habitats. All languages are able to express everything. What a language does need in order to survive in a context that its more conducive to its abandonment by its speakers, is a political class that endows it with prestige and renders it useful, a

political class which promotes the citizens' will to preserve it in action, not a political class that uses the language as a kind of put-on show in the presence of an audience.

On the other hand, and in my opinion, two languages cannot cohabit harmoniously in the same territory, and in a state of equality. Sooner or later, one will impose itself upon the other and all efforts to defend the minority one will become indispensable, but insufficient. It is not enough that politicians engage with the protection of the Galician language in their documents, when all the private documents are written in Castilian. It'll not be enough that Galician is introduced in the schools and in ONE state TV channel, when ALL the other channels, much more aggressive and ruthless, all the cinema screens and the majority of the written press and the radio use only Castilian.

This situation creates a rather perverse scenario: it is now the speakers of the foreign language, the hegemonic one, who protest because the government is attempting to impose a weak and worthless language, when what they want is to go up the economic and social ladder. Some speakers of Spanish are outraged at this situation, as if they were being forced to learn Latin or Sanskrit attending to a bunch of old and rancid historical considerations.

There are more perverse situations: from the ranks of the Spanish and of Spanish-promoting press, we are told that "Galician literature" is the one written by Galician writers, whether they write in Galician or in Castilian. This way we would even have our own Nobel-prize winner, Camilo José Cela. It is true that some of the greatest authors in Spanish letters were or are Galician. But it's not less true that in Madrid they welcome writers such as Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes or any other Latin American as a member of their own family, just because they write in Spanish. So what about Galician? What about Basques? For those in the centre, we are aliens from another planet, we're

twisted, scabby people, members of a satanic sect, bitter and ugly people living underground: we are hysterical people spitting their bile. We are not welcome, we are stopped in our tracks, we are called separatists. There you have a literary system which is clearly defined, the Spanish one, defined by the Spanish language. Bilingualism is for them a strategy for achieving their ultimate goal: one country, one language.

This kind of anesthetic bilingualism, which is effective from the point of view of those who keenly await the minority language's slow death, is the model implemented by the Galician government's language policies, always led by Spanish parties. This is a model which widens the space at the top, among those who can create and vent their opinions, trusting that this effect is vertically transmitted, while neglecting the mechanisms that influence society's linguistic selection and use. It's the same old song again, a kind of charitable act by the paternalistic elites who adopt the role of scientists and who leave the role of guinea pigs for the rest.

You cannot force people to train and sacrifice themselves for a sport that they cannot then practice. It's pointless to teach someone how to ride a bike if they don't actually have a bike. To do so does not amount to promoting a sport, but to breed negative attitudes against it. What people want are bicycles, not cycling lessons. And bikes will not be much use, anyway, if we force them to ride them along the highways.

But anything that can be done for the language is ultimately a good thing, and I will share a personal anecdote with you.

When I was a kid, I asked my parents to buy me a cassette player. They wouldn't give it to me so I started to buy and record tapes in order to impress them. They ended up buying me one. Pressure worked in the end, but what brought a solution to the conflict was my parents'

budgetary contribution. My cassettes already had music in them but for me to be able to listen to them (and talking about music this is quite relevant) my parents' "political power" was decisive, that is, the coincidence between my will and theirs.

Language policies in Galicia today, and to some extent also Galician literature, consist of buying tapes, or cds, or memory cards, just to see if they end up buying us the actual player. Galician literature, and also Galician language policies, are a way of exerting pressure in order to overcome the imbalance that exists between the thousand books that are published each year and the number of real readers who can benefit from them, which is visibly shrinking, in a context where the feeling is that of an increasing number of virtual opportunities.

Writers and publishing houses behave as if we functioned in a normal country, we write books which are not specifically Galician, but European, we make movies of plays just like the Finnish or the Dutch; we make music like the Welsh or the French: we feign an attitude of pseudo-normality or pseudo-reality, just to see if this normality will end up actually existing by our sheer calling it thus. This is a dubious strategy, but we have no other choice.

We Galicians have the reputation of using a kind of defensive irony in conversations, of expressing ourselves by dint of sacrificing all the pawns in order to save the tower and the queen. There's an element of truth in there: it's the way of the oppressed. We can therefore benefit from this faking of normality, while from the outside we must be perceived as not really straining ourselves to feign anything. But among ourselves we can't be cajoled by voluntarism and this virtual reality, by the simulations that are offered to us or that we ourselves create. We have no army with which to oppose the hegemonic language, our war has to be a guerrilla war and our best weapon has to be that of our will

to resist. Either we live or we die, there's no middle ground. The enemy has to be clear about this.

No one wants a war, of course. In the cultural debate determination is strengthened with the democratic defence of our political rights, and from that point onwards, with the satisfaction of being ourselves, with the pride of knowing what we have been and with the ambition of creating our own cultural products in the context of a European environment, not only in the Spanish one. Quality will make us stronger. I am not satisfied only by the fact that my novels are compared with those of other Galician writers, I want my novels to be compared with those of Paul Auster or Angela Carter, with those of Don Delillo or Thomas Bernhard. My readings, the music I listen to, the films I watch and like, my intelligence and my life are similar to those of these authors: it's only logical that I may write in a similar way, leaving talent aside, of course, which, here and elsewhere, is always unpredictable.

A culture is alive for as long as it contributes innovations and fights for its own space: it fades away when it settles only for mere survival and the repetition of the same schemes allowed by public funding.

In Galician literature, not everybody thinks like me and two diverging trends cohabit: on the one hand, the trend for compliance and simply letting the whole thing rest; on the other, the trend for transgression. It's like this everywhere, those who innovate to one side, those who prefer to imitate and repeat to the other.

Just between ourselves, at present, the tendency towards compliance continues to be a majority one, not only among the writers, but also among the readers who, as befits the heirs of their own history, divide their readings into two groups: they read a series of books because they are written in Galician and then they turn to Castilian when they read

the works that they really like and enjoy. Reading in Galician is then like visiting your relatives, while the other reads are like spending time with the friends we really choose to be with, or with our lovers. It's far from my intention to incite the readers to be incestuous: I would like only to be read for pleasure, even though as a bonus I write in Galician. But I am not a relative.

Those writers who tend to comply want to be crystal-clear when they create, they want to do simple things so that they don't scare the public off, they like to deal with basic issues: their interests belong more in the normalisation process than in that of artistic renewal. My interest is fundamentally artistic, normalisation will then naturally ensue. One has to shake, or agitate, the audience, make them uneasy, one has to create a kind of discomfort in them; we neither hide those conflicting aspects of reality away from them nor spoon-feed them. When we write freely, our surroundings, our environment will inevitably surface, even in disguise, whether we want it or not.

It also depends on where each of us comes from. Typically, Galician writers would come from well-to-do families, their reality ran in parallel to that of the popular classes but without ever converging and the things they wrote would recreate this distance. Over time, however, people who came from humbler environments also gained access to culture and this was my case.

At home and during my childhood years, there were no books. There wasn't a single book there. The first two books that entered our house were the ones my elder brothers had to read compulsorily for school: *Lights of Bohemia* by Valle-Inclán and *A Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez. I did not live in one of those typically Galician manor houses but in a tiny apartment next to the road. My parents owned a butcher's and they were Galician speakers, but they spoke Castilian to their four children. This kind of schizophrenic behaviour

was rife among the working classes and still persists nowadays. They thought that by speaking Castilian to us they were preparing us for a life of success, in the belief that speaking the minority language would be our ruin. My generation still couldn't study Galician in school and in my dull little town, there wasn't a single cultural activity, neither music nor art exhibitions or theatre. There wasn't a single library. There was absolutely nothing! Only a cinema and comics.

When I started gradually gaining access to literature, therefore, I did so in a somewhat furtive manner. For a teenager, and even more so in a context such as that one, to read was almost shameful. However, my school folders at High School were covered with photos of Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, Franz Kafka, Henry Miller, Hemingway, Joyce or Faulkner, instead of covering them with photos of singers or famous sportsmen. I was what you call a literature freak. When I went to university in Santiago de Compostela I would go to the library and that felt for me like stepping into the chocolate factory.

Around that time I began to write but I did this secretly too. My parents could see that I read excessively, but for them reading meant actually studying, so that was alright. When I was 28 I published my first novel and they only learnt about this when it had already been published. Telling them about it would be better than letting them know through the press, I thought. Better, but not easier. Telling them that I had published a book felt like committing a crime: I almost felt I should be apologising for having dragged their name in the mire.

When I reflect today on these past fears of mine, I can see that there was something more than just shyness. I can see a reflection of the situation regarding Galician culture and language at that time. And I can also see the fears and insecurities that any writer will go through. It's understandable that my works have a furtive air, it's understandable that they show a constant fluctuation between breakage and

disappointment, but that's the type of mood with which all creative subjects have to live. After having published nine books, I still have my old fears and insecurities. I do not know whether what I write is worth anything, I don't know whether it's politically correct or whether it adds to the construction of Galician identity: identities can be constructed vertically, just like they did when they created a standard norm for the language; or horizontally when incorporating diverse and even contradictory tendencies, which is how languages naturally evolve.

When a given culture breeds its own sub-cultures, when the canon and other social and aesthetic preconceptions are questioned from within, that means that that culture is alive. And in order to be strong, it's a good job we're alive first. A culture that is built upon only one single master plan is a sickly culture. In the case of Galicia or Wales, to go from the stage of confrontation with the English or the Spanish culture to a phase of internal dissidence is a symptom of vitality.

It is in this sense that I do consider my work to be a contribution to this enriching and strengthening process. At least when I am in a good mood, I do. In general, I limit myself to riding the bike and pedalling: I do not know the laws of physics that explain that I can keep my balance, neither do I count the pedalling movements I make per minute nor do I know anything about the history of the bicycle. Some of the ones looking at me claim to know about these things, and they indeed love to go around lecturing people on these matters, but the one who's riding the bike is me.

As I said before, my parents were monolingual Galician speakers, but they strained themselves so that their children would climb out of that dark, dark well. And not only that, I still remember how they told me off when I decided to start speaking Galician, I remember even how they would make fun of me. It's not that they didn't love us: my father for instance, would also speak in Castilian to his dog, and I can assure you

that he loved his dog lots: he cried his eyes out when it died. So I gather they loved us too. But my parents were a clear example of what we call self-hatred.

Today, and according to the statistics, young people have an increasingly positive attitude towards the Galician language but they don't actually speak it, particularly in the cities. Further, young people are reading more books than ever, but few Galician books. Where does this leave the Galician language and the writers who write in it?

Political authorities in Galicia treat the language as a sickly patient, and people do not want a sickly patient to embody their future prospects. We have to rescue the language from paternalism and from the laments of those who wouldn't in reality care too much if it did die, those who would in fact feel slightly liberated that it did. The Galician language must effect a kind of protest, even an aggressive one on occasion, it must rebel itself against the politicians who make a virtual use of it, if we don't want the politicians to use it against us.

And what about literature?

Those of us who are nationalists within a stateless nation are often called narrow-minded, they often say of us that we do not care about what lies outside our borders, that we want to live in the past and that we are excessively ideologised. The pretext for this kind of accusation derives from the fact that we are defending what is ours and attempt to dignify it, and of course we support our actions on a sense of tradition, which is what legitimates us. Those who accuse us of being narrow-minded or nostalgic do so from within the ranks of Spanish nationalism, which does not see itself as such, but as a natural condition, a sort of non-ideology. But they are the ones who are narrow-minded, the ones who do not want anything to move, because the current state of things benefits them both politically and economically.

We Galician nationalists want to open to the world, we want to be recognised and to contribute with our culture.

In the past few decades, our autonomous institutions have been enacting a kind of mock self-government, which is in reality extremely limited when it comes to its capacity for decision-making. Among the people who participate in that government, we can also surmise that many of them will prefer to remain still and for things to stay as they are. Literature has also made some space for itself in the educative system, and several associations of writers and other cultural organisations have been created, which allow the people who live off culture and university people to exist in a kind of simulated normality. All the while, I reiterate, the number of speakers is going down.

Immobility is an unsuitable path for the future, also for our literature. We must know our tradition and support our arguments on it, but we must not limit ourselves to replicate it. We need to be ambitious and to aim at modernity. Those of us operating from within minority cultures must hold the most avant-garde positions: the only way for young people to share in our stance is in fact to struggle for avant-garde and non-conformist action. For this to be possible, we have to have a will to look at the future we have to be optimistic. We can't really take into account the pessimistic or conformist ones. Let each of our steps forward not be an accomplished objective, but only a previous step for the ones to come.

“Ultreia Ultréia!” shouted the pilgrims to Santiago as they walked on. Further on, further on!!! That is the way to survival.

Many thanks,

Xurxo Borrazás.