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- Inkheart • Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell • Cloud Atlas • Never Let Me Go
- Wizard of the Crow • The Yiddish Policemen's Union
- The Hunger Games • IQB4 • The Man with the Compound Eyes
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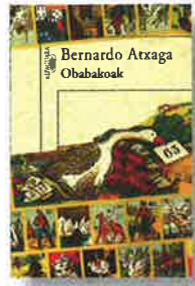
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BERNARDO ATXAGA

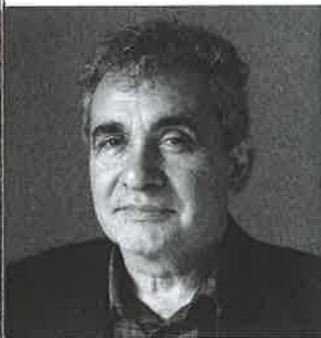
## OBABAKOAK (1988)

*A collection of interrelated stories about life and the stories people tell, including that of the narrator's childhood in an imaginary Basque-speaking town, featuring a whirlwind of sleuthing, storytelling, and dialogue about literature and myth-making in "big" and "small" cultures.*

First published by Editorial Erein in 1988.

Basque or Euskera is a non-Indo-European language of unknown origins, possibly the oldest in Europe, and is spoken in Spain, France, and the U.S., Atxaga writes first in Basque, and translates his text into Spanish with the help of his wife.

*Obabakoak* launched Atxaga's career outside the Basque Country when it received the Spanish Premio Nacional de Literatura.



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Critics have referred to Bernardo Atxaga (b.1951) not just as a Basque novelist, but as *the* Basque novelist, and his writing seeks to evoke his heritage without taking refuge in rose-tinted nostalgia. He was born in the small Basque-speaking village of Asteasu, near San Sebastian, at a time when Basque areas were still reeling from Franco's attempts to eradicate the culture.

In *Obabakoak*—a collection of interrelated stories based in the fictional village of Obaba—Atxaga has transformed the then-rigid borders of Basque identity into an elastic new space, both solid and transient, recognizable and unrecognizable, dark and bright, tempting, appealing, and beckoning to the traveler. "Obabakoak" means both "of the people and things from Obaba" and "Stories from Obaba," and the village is depicted in the stories as experienced by someone: thus, for the young or Romantic it is a "toy valley" or *locus amoenus*; for the marginalized characters, including writers (who take shelter in primordial spaces such as woods, jungles, mountains, or the outskirts), it is violent, full of threats and dark secrets.

Obaba is a small, insignificant place to most people: letters from the big city often do not reach it. Yet, Atxaga does not connect power to size. In his view, like that of a naive painter, everything exists on the same plane and has the same value. Most of the action does not take place in the town center, but at scenic overlooks because, rather than a site to be looked upon, Obaba is a perspective from which the world is perceived. Furthermore, Obaba's borders are extremely permeable, as in a dream—a concept befitting a town whose name stems from the first words of a Basque lullaby ("*oba, oba*" means "hush, hush")—and readers are constantly carried to unknown and unlikely places such as the Amazon jungle.

Furthermore, Atxaga establishes an unbreakable connection between landscape and storytelling. The protagonist of the first story is a geographer who recollects his childhood in Obaba. This image of geographer-writer not only promotes credibility (à la Macondo for Gabriel García Márquez, page 204, Comala for Juan Rulfo, page 192, or Yoknapatawpha County for William Faulkner) but also calls attention to the process of fiction-making,



which is omnipresent in the tales. *Obabakoak* is full of stories and rewritings ("plagiarisms," as the narrator calls them) from the works of many authors such as Borges, Kafka, Celan, Calvino, Perec, Stevenson, Dante, Axular, and Cervantes.

And above everything, *Obabakoak* maps the creative process of Bernardo Atxaga. Obaba is a pool into which he dives in order to explore the childhood experiences and mysteries that constituted the humus of his creativity. Thus, his exploration in "Childhoods" (the first section of the book) of the rich tradition of Basque beliefs from Asteasu precedes the series of narratives inspired by writers who influenced the author. The map of Atxaga's creative interior, his inner-life, shows an author who jumps over frontiers between literature and orality, Basque and non-Basque, different audiences and aesthetics—pre-, post-, and modern.

The sleepy Basque-speaking village of Asteasu, near San Sebastian, the inspiration behind Obaba.