



## Bernardo Atxaga

2008 PREMIO LETTERARIO INTERNAZIONALE MONDELLO

Euskaltzaindia (Royal Academy of the Basque Language)  
Donostia-San Sebastian, Spain

### Poem for my friend Lazkano

I The flight lasted eight hours, and it took a further two hours to get out of the airport and find the car that had come to fetch us. Our daughters were exhausted, and the youngest, who was then only three, immediately fell asleep. Not so our eldest, who was five at the time. 'I'm thinking,' she said after a while, when we asked why she couldn't sleep. She added that something odd had happened. 'I didn't see the people,' she said. 'All that time travelling through the sky and I didn't see them.' We asked her which people she was referring to: 'The people who are dead,' she answered.

II We were driving across the Arizona desert. Fancifully shaped rocks rose out of the earth like small islands in a reddish sea. There wasn't a cloud in the sky.

We told the girls to look out of the car window and contemplate that landscape so different from our own and from that of any other country in Europe. They did as asked, but, being children, only long enough to appear to be obeying before getting back to their own affairs, which are rarely contemplative. We tried again and spoke of the members of our family who had never made a journey like that. 'They would be amazed to see this desert. Look how big it is. It goes on and on.'

'I really really wish Ignacio was here,' our youngest daughter said suddenly; she was eight by then. She was referring to a friend of whom she was very fond and who had died shortly before we set off for America.

We all hastened to agree, especially her older sister, who was now ten. Aware of her responsibilities, she said: 'Ignacio went to heaven, so he won't feel any need to see the desert.' I supported this point of view. I spoke of Ignacio's long life and the good times we had enjoyed together. I resorted to the same metaphor: 'Don't you worry. Ignacio will be very happy in heaven.'

'I'm not so sure,' she said. 'It can't be very nice being so high up.'

#### BIO

Bernardo Atxaga graduated in Economics from the University of the Basque Country. Mr. Atxaga is internationally acclaimed as one of the major writers in Euskara, the Basque language. He is the most widely translated Basque writer and has been awarded the most number of prizes. Among his many awards include: the Euskadi Prize (1989, 1997, 1999), the Spanish Fiction Award (1989), Paris Milepages (1991), the Atlantic Pyrenees Three Crowns Award (1995), the Eusko Ikaskuntza Prize (2002), the Cesare Pavese Award for Poetry (2003), the Mondello Prize for International Literature (2008) and the Grinzane Cavour Prize (2008) and the Spanish Critics' Prize (1978, 1985, 1988, 1993, 2003). He regularly lectures at universities around the world and appears as an essential author on lists of 21st century writers such as The Observer's "21 Top Writers" list of 1999.