

## THE MAN OF WAR by Ramiro Pinilla

### REVIEW by Bernardo Fernández

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Translated by Lita Power

My dear friend Carmen Kilner has kindly invited me to write a review of the latest book published by the author **Ramiro Pinilla**, "*El Hombre de la Guerra*" which I have read with great pleasure because of its links with the odyssey of the "**Niños Vascos**" (The Basque Children). It is in fact a novel which was only published posthumously ten years later.

It must be pointed out in advance that it is not a book "about" the Niños; it is not a historical novel but a fictional noir novel of crime or mystery which nevertheless, it arguably proceeds along these lines, based on war and its consequences, and leads to the terrible exile of the Niños and the tragedy of their families.

According to the epilogist of the novel, **Maria Bengoa**, "'The Man of War' is about the wars that never end and *the stories that are written time and again*". The war that never ends is what influences the whole story throughout and is at the very heart of the plot. When the main character, Urko, asks the doctor who was present at his mother's death, what she died of, he replied: "She died of war". "But", says Urko, "didn't my mother die in 1940, when there was no war?" "Tell me about a war that ever ended" replied the doctor.

As a consequence of the war, the writer turns to the exile of the Niños Vascos of 1937. The main character himself, Urko, is a Niño who was evacuated to England in the "Habana" and returns to Getxo in the Basque Country thirty six years later to reconnect with his childhood world "*that he deeply yearns for*" as is indicated by the above author. He finds his farmhouse "Mallatu" in a state of decay where a mystery lies hidden and which he intensively strives to bring to light throughout the story.

I have enjoyed -and suffered through this story, which is truly engaging and keeps the reader in suspense as he unravels the tragic events that took place in this farmhouse. But for the purpose of this review in the 'Newsletter', I would like to point out the author's summary of what is significant in this episode of the exile of those children for this main character some of which, unable to resist, I reproduce in a few paragraphs.

*"He lived in London for thirty six years, all the time feeling himself to be stateless. London was witness to his infancy, the unfolding of his youth and the progression to solitary adulthood, but the city never left an impression on him. For thirty six years he resisted the nostalgia for a little piece of Basque land, due to the fear it would bring if he began packing his suitcase. He was afraid of Spain. He left Spain in nineteen thirty seven as one among a consignment of refugee children, and after a length of time he still had not readjusted to the idea of defeat. The war left him without parents".... "He gradually lost touch with his roots. He came to the point in which in his dreams, he dreamt he was English and that he had come from a laboratory"..."At the age of thirty, he had read so many books about Spain that he*

*came back down to earth. One Christmas, before a baked sea bream, he became conscious for the first time of his exiled existence and that night, he took a photograph of the farmhouse where he was born and placed it next to a portrait of his parents. As the years passed, his fear of Spain increased. Convinced that it was a sign that he came from a cursed point in time, he struggled tenaciously to belief in a society that was faultless, but his thoughts always brought up the ghost of a war which never ended.”*

I think the writings of this book will unearth interest and emotions among the Niños and their families, friends and students.