

Dolores Redondo – The Baztán Trilogy Sequels and prequels

Dolores Redondo's novels invite us on a journey. Through her Baztán trilogy, she portrays the Basque Country in a way that truly encourages its discovery, revealing its most secluded and secret corners, far away from its most touristy beaches. A fascinating triple mirror whose reflections raises to the visitor the question of the reality of what lies before his eyes beyond appearances: the movies, the novels, and the country itself. What do these creations reveal to us, what do they share that remains inaccessible to the average tourist? One might be surprised, at times, to find oneself wandering the streets of Elizondo, a novel in hand, searching for all those places that hold a significance for them, a significance whose reality is questionable. Is it like in the novels? But if what I see possess a darker, and certainly different, meaning, hidden from my gaze as a wanderer during my brief visit?

It's striking to discover this trilogy adorning a corner of a library shelf in a rented apartment, just as it is to notice an Eguzkiloire on the doors of some houses, not only in Elizondo but also in smaller villages like Arizkun. One seeks out deep forest paths and ancient places while traversing a land known to be full of legends, history, and sorcery. Are there monsters and gods? Dolores Redondo has borne witness to the enduring nature of very ancient beliefs that form the identity of a people who have inhabited this land for a very long time, much longer than the relatively recent arrival of Christianity.



Dolores Redondo's central work consists of three novels that make up the Baztán trilogy: *The Invisible Guardian* (2013), *The Legacy of the Bones* (2015), and *Offering to the Storm* (2016). It is extended by three other texts published later: *The North Face of the Heart* (2019) and *Awaiting the Flood* (2024) take place chronologically before the trilogy, and finally, *Those Who Don't Sleep* (2024) follows it.

The complete study of this work will follow the following plan:

- I – Film adaptations
- II – The characters in the novels
 - A – Variety of male characters
 - B – The diversity of women
- III – Amaia Salazar
- IV- The Monsters
- V – Interpretations
- Conclusions

**Warning: This study reveals key plot points from the novels.
(Major spoilers ahead)**

I - Film adaptations

Three films were made to adapt the trilogy, with the same titles as the books, between 2017 and 2020. Maria Etura plays the investigator Amaia Salazar in them, directed by Fernando González Molina. While they are enjoyable to watch, it is definitely best to watch them *after* reading the novels, as they reveal plot points and significantly alter the meaning and depth of the stories. Let's examine the differences between the texts and these screen adaptations before studying the novels themselves.



The conclusion of all three movies takes place during a major storm, which aligns with the author's statement in the preface to *Awaiting the Flood*: "I am a storm writer." While the setting of the final novel's conclusion differs, this relatively minor alteration to the plot remains insignificant compared to other, more substantial changes. These include, among others:

- In the conclusion of the first film, Amaia's injury is transformed into a car accident that triggers a mysterious intervention, presumably by the *Basajaun*. But this significantly alters the course of events, including the meaning of the assassination that concludes this first novel.

- The relations between the foral police and the civil guard are not staged. We therefore understand much less who Amaia goes to see about the old Teresa Klas case, this visit taking place at a completely different time in the investigation.

- In the second film, the chronology is greatly altered regarding Amaia's giving birth. It's understandable that, for the sake of simplification and plot efficiency, James's parents, Amaia's husband, don't come from the USA to see their newborn grandson. But the cost of this simplification is considerable in terms of portraying the couple's relationship.

- Many important characters are also presented in a cursory manner, particularly Aunt Engrasi, who loses almost all her depth, becoming simply a charming old lady whose role remains very limited. For example, she doesn't hold any meetings with the village women, and we learn nothing about her past as a psychologist or the depth of her understanding of Basque myths.

- We should also note the two suicides at the end of the third film, which do not have the same meaning at all as in the novels, in particular with the absence of Sara Duran, Xavier Tabese's wife.

- But above all, the male characters are very different—particularly Inspector Montes, who leads the search of a forest cabin and later discovers the remains of sacrifices deep within a cave, at the end of a long spelunking trek in the first film's finale. Such a character and his actions have little in common with the one who appears in the novels, apart from the name. This significantly diminishes the strong feminist dimension of the writing and the very unflattering portrayal of many of the male characters that the author constructs.

These alterations certainly reinforce the strictly police-procedural aspect of the films' plots, but at the cost of the cultural and mythological significance of the texts, which is largely eclipsed. While the *Basajaun* remains a mysterious presence in the first film, the goddess Mari disappears completely, even though her striking presence expresses the strongest mythological meaning of the entire narrative structure. These are not the only points; consider, for example, the lamiai, who are absent from the adaptations.

The endings of the three films remain open, leaving the possibility that the murderer is still alive. The novels, however, do not conclude in this way at all, with a clearly identified culprit whose nature reinforces the fantastical, rather than strictly detective-story, dimension of the narratives as a whole.

The films are captivating, very well made, and convincingly acted. They have the merit of presenting the Baztán Valley and Basque culture in a constructive way, but at the cost of sacrificing what constitutes the identity and richness of this culture: the depth of its myths and their still very much alive historical dimension. It is precisely these aspects that the analysis of the stories you are about to read will focus on.

II – The characters in the novels

Since we're dealing with the *crime fiction* genre, let's begin by analyzing the police world in which Dolores Redondo develops her central character. Amaia Salazar holds the rank of inspector in the foral police, initially based in Pamplona. As an embodiment of authority, the police force is traditionally a paternal and masculine figure. Amaia is indeed the only woman in this male-dominated world, mostly located in Elizondo.

A – Variety of male characters

She is quickly given command of her team. The older Inspector Fermin Montes greets Amaia's appointment to head the investigation into the murders of young girls with considerable irony (Vol. I, ch. 4, p. 43¹). Initially presented as a misogynist and alcoholic, and rather ridiculous from the outset (ch. 2), Montes undergoes significant development in the first two volumes of the trilogy. In particular, he is shown being manipulated by Amaia's sister, Flora, in the first novel. He collapses when he realizes he has been merely a manipulated tool, and has also betrayed his professional obligations. His arduous return to the foral police force plays a major role in the plot of the second novel, culminating in the memorable scene where he gets into a fight with Amaia in an alley in Elizondo (Vol. II, ch. 31, p. 466). Only then will he be able to rejoin the team with the support of his boss.



His colleague Zabalza doesn't paint a more flattering portrait of the policeman: he admits to having fled neither his origins nor his family (Volume I, Chapter 12, p. 212). Thus, he remains trapped within a cultural framework that leads him to struggle with his homosexuality, which he does everything to conceal, even if it means giving up his marriage. The plot raises numerous doubts about his responsibility in the crimes. We should also mention agent Emerson in the United States, Stella Tucker's partner in "*The North Face of the Heart*". He will turn against her out of sheer, petty careerism once it becomes clear that she was wrong from the start in the parallel investigation they conducted.

The portrayal of the police environment is, however, very nuanced and does not at all consist of a systematic condemnation of this very masculine world. This nuanced perspective reinforces the relevance of a critical viewpoint whose meaning is primarily feminist.

¹The page references are to the French Folio paperback edition, except for *Those who don't sleep*, which refers to the large-format Gallimard edition.

Unlike Emerson, Aloisius Dupree makes no advances toward Amaia. He waits for her to demonstrate her full potential as the talented police officer he sees in her, and plays a central role in her training and career. His discreet and somewhat mysterious presence remains constant throughout the trilogy, even as his complex career continues in the United States.

Let's briefly mention Dr. San Martin, the forensic pathologist who intervenes at almost every crime scene. He gives us the image of a competent professional and an accomplished scientist, like Nadia Takchenko's husband, Raul Gonzalez.

Jonan Etxaide plays a pivotal role throughout the trilogy. A highly cultured police officer deeply respectful of Basque traditions and culture, he is present at most crime scenes and often accompanies Amaia on their car journeys, which take them across much of the Basque Country. His contribution to Amaia's intellectual evolution is considerable, as his erudition often leads them to go beyond simply searching for a serial killer. His open homosexuality is significant in challenging the traditional cultural representation of what a man, or a "male," should be, particularly within the police force. His tragic fate at the trilogy's conclusion further underscores his central role alongside the main character.



The questioning of the strength and power of the dominant male is very clear in the construction of the various figures of the assassin, as well as the men that Amaia will encounter in her investigations beyond her colleagues.

Certainly, there are hardened killers. Novels are full of fundamentally evil individuals who revel in violence, like Jason Medina or especially Ramon Quiralte (*The Legacy of the Bones*, ch. 1). Lisardo Murrieta (*Those Who Don't Sleep*) has a very strong personality, if we are to believe the story of this elderly man portrayed as almost bedridden, with declining mental faculties. The truth behind his image as a rich and powerful man is that of an incestuous rapist, the last survivor of a family cursed by a murdered witch. He takes over the criminal career of his mother, the Bermian woman, and ends his life cared for by a nurse with a more than troubled personal and family history: Ederne Hidalgo, niece of the "midwife of death."

However, the murderers' personalities remain complex and raise the question of the origin of evil. Teenagers suspected of crimes or murders are often exonerated, such as Miguel Angel de Andres, suspected of the very first murder, Santy (in *Those Who Don't Sleep*), or especially Benat Zaldúa in the second volume. It is through him that the *Cagots* are mentioned; we understand that their long

history of segregation and constant discrimination marked by violence could fuel in him a feeling of revolt, directed against the Christian church. The portrait of his completely alcoholic father is hardly encouraging... Is man therefore not born evil but becomes so?

Benat's background helps explain why he is so easily manipulated by Antonio Garrido, who, despite not being the instigator of his crimes, is in a subservient relationship with the true culprit. This Garrido holds his wife captive for two years, but flees "shitting himself with fear" when she manages to rebel (*The Legacy of the Bones*, ch. 25, p. 420). The emphasis on his filth effectively highlights his mediocrity.

The murderer in the first volume, Victor Oyarzabal, is also not exactly a shining example of strength of character. A motorcycle enthusiast, which undoubtedly enhances his sense of masculinity, Flora's first husband is an alcoholic completely dependent on her, consumed by the most retrograde religious notions of what a woman should be. For over 20 years, he murders numerous young girls whom he considers "whores."

Another serial killer also had a very long career driven by morbid religious beliefs: Martin Lenx, in *The North Face of the Heart*. His personality and motivations are complex, but he is clearly a victim of the morbid violence of his aunts who, by forcing him to drink their menstrual blood, shaped his criminal personality. The lengthy descriptions of his childhood in no way excuse his crimes but allow us to understand a convoluted path from his initial innocence.



The social origins of the criminals, as well as their psychological profiles, appear very varied. If some men are certain that the sacrifice of their newborn daughter will bring wealth, they will not hesitate to *offer* her: these are the profiles of Marcel Tremond, or also Valentin Esparza in volume III, who is not distinguished by his intelligence or strength of character.

This masculine weakness does not systematically lead to murderous violence, thankfully. In the fourth novel, *Those Who Don't Sleep*, for example, we see Helena Murrieta's two husbands, whose very subdued, not to say insignificant, character is striking. Her first husband, Pascal Dancur, is described as a *gizajo* (Saturday, March 14, p. 451): an imbecile, lacking personality. This label could be applied to many other men. Freddy, the husband of Amaia's other sister, Ros, spends his life playing video games without working. He is manipulated by Anne Aribizu, is suspected of her murder, and attempts suicide, which leaves him disabled.

It's an exaggeration to call Juan, Amaia's father, a "*gizajo*". But while he saved his daughter's life by entrusting her to her aunt Engrasi, he more or less covers up the subsequent actions of his wife

Rosario, who manipulates him as she pleases. "I know you, Juan, you're not a bad man, but you don't have any balls," (*The North Face of the Heart*, ch. 21, p. 227) Engrasi tells him, adding that she will do anything to protect her niece from her mother.

Laurent Herzog, finally, is not a criminal, but a prestigious anthropologist who is having an affair with Nash Elizondo, the main character of the latest novel. He does everything he can to establish his dominance over her and tries to steal her archaeological discovery. It's another difficulty Nash will encounter when she tries to extract a mysterious skeleton from this chasm, where women who rock the boat are thrown if they cannot be burned alive.

Finally, let us mention James, Amaia's husband, an artist very happy to pursue his career in the Basque Country and to live in the village where his wife was born. He strongly insists on having a child, which Amaia does not want, and shows great patience in the face of the difficulties in their relationship just after the birth of Ibai (*The Legacy of the Bones*, ch. 8, p. 136).

It bears repeating that Dolores Redondo's clearly feminist message is all the more robust for not relying on a wholesale condemnation of what it means to be a man. The portrayals of men lacking strength of character are not universal; on the contrary, the diversity of the characters is the great strength of this rich universe. This diversity is also found in the female personalities we will now examine.

B – The diversity of women

Women are victims of male violence from a very young age. One of the main purposes of Dolores Redondo's entire literary work is to express this violence, in its many forms, which begins as early as the cradle where they can be sacrificed. Amaia's son survives his grandmother only because he is a boy.

Let's begin our study with a few survivors.

Nuria Otaño experienced extreme male violence at the hands of her partner, Antonio Garrido, who held her captive for two years, chained to a straw mattress. She was found prostrate in a washing machine after four months in the hospital, weighing only forty kilos. Her sister managed to restore her will to live and her self-confidence by training her in shooting, to the point that she was able to drive her tormentor from her home with a rifle. She proudly displays this feat, smiling, in a memorable scene in the second volume (chapter 26). Thus, to what extent is a human being defined by his own actions as the expression of his freedom, given the violence men are capable of inflicting upon women to subjugate them? Nuria provides us with a striking example.

Yolanda Berrueta also illustrates the immense strength and determination a woman can muster to uncover the truth about her children's deaths. She goes so far as to blow up their gravestone, despite her husband's attempts to prevent their exhumation, and is brutally mutilated by the explosion. Yolanda is a complex character whose story unfolds across much of the final volume of the trilogy. It is only late in the plot (Vol. III, Chapter 39, p. 408) that it is confirmed she had three children, not two, including a daughter, Haizea, who also died of sudden infant death syndrome (meaning concealed sacrifice) before her twin sons passed away. Of course, Yolanda's husband, Marcel Tremond (Chapter 29, p. 286), conceals this, primarily seeking to portray his former wife as insane.

Not all women possess such courage, even those who have tried to flee what they know to be a criminal horror. This is the case of Elena Ochoa, who lives in terror after separating from her former friend Rosario Iturzaeta, Amaia's mother (*North Face of the Heart*, ch. 21 p. 221 and especially *The Legacy of the Bones*, ch. 24 p. 410). She is murdered in a gruesome and inexplicable way, with walnuts, at the beginning of Volume III (p. 122 ch. 13), after speaking with Amaia, who suspects that

her mother is still alive. The significant clues she provides (ch. 9 p. 77 and ch. 17 p. 142) will cost her her life.

But not all the women portrayed are such victims. The main female characters, present throughout the trilogy, are Amaia's close relatives: her two sisters, Flora and Rosaura, and her aunt Engrasi. All three reflect Amaia's growing personal involvement in the whole criminal plot.



Flora is the eldest, having taken over the family cake factory after their father's death and their mother's hospitalization. A very harsh and authoritarian personality, a "despotic queen to whom nothing escapes" (Volume I, last chapter, p. 505), she seems to be the closest to their mother, Rosario. She insists to bury her even though her body has not yet been found. She kills her first husband, Victor, at the end of *The Invisible Guardian*, telling him that she "hates the txatxingorris" (p. 515) that she spends her life making, and will later claim that she has done the work of justice that should not be delayed if one waits for Amaia.

While she appears suspicious for part of the third volume due to her mysterious use of nuts, these are in fact offerings in memory of her deceased daughter, whom she abandoned: Anne Arbizu, murdered in the first volume as a teenager, even though her mother saved her from being sacrificed at birth. Volume II already reveals something curious (ch. 15, p. 250), and the end of the trilogy reveals that Flora has remained in the village of Elizondo, which she despises, to watch her daughter grow up from afar, "stuck in this backwater just to stay near her" (Volume III, ch. 51, p. 521). In reality, she kills Victor to avenge her murdered daughter and hated her mother even more than her sister Amaia did — her mother who asked her son-in-law to "finish the job" with Anne, whom she couldn't bring herself to kill at birth.

Ros (Rosaura) is a much more sympathetic character and closer to Amaia and Aunt Engrasi. Amaia sums up her relationship with Flora thus: "In their entire lives, they had never agreed on anything" (Volume III, p. 526, ch. 51). She will settle her accounts with her older sister at the end of the trilogy.

Engrasi Salazar, Amaia's aunt, is among the most important characters.

Besides her practice of card reading, her profound knowledge of Basque myths and traditions is linked to her childhood encounter with the *basajaun*, who protected her from falling into a crevasse. She was punished by a Christian priest for mentioning this encounter with a creature of the old religion (T. ch 16 I p.162, also T. III ch. 31 p. 308).

A trained psychologist, she practiced in France until her husband's death. She then returned to live in Elizondo, where she has remained ever since. She takes in and shelters her niece after her mother attempts to kill her. She protected her as much as she could until she decided to send her to the United States for her safety, as described in the novel *The North Face of the Heart*, in which Engrasi plays a central role.

Her large house in the center of Elizondo, her gatherings with friends, her excellent knowledge of the village and its inhabitants, and her cooking, all contribute greatly to giving substance and depth to the stories whose heart remains the Baztán Valley. Her dedication nearly costs her her life at the end of the second volume, when Rosario comes to kidnap Ibai, Amaia's son. It is moving to discover that she has survived at the very end of the second novel.

In this same second volume, Engrazi makes a surprising statement which will be taken up as an epigraph to *Those Who Don't Sleep*: "The dead do what they can" (Vol. II p. 471 ch. 31).

The victims of all these criminals are almost exclusively women. Therefore, while we can discover the personalities of adult women as survivors of this violence, we do not, in principle, encounter the victims themselves, since they are deceased, often very young. Ainhoa Elizasu, Carla Huarte, and Anne Arbizu are mentioned in the first volume.

This turns out to be inaccurate in two dimensions.

First, the main character of the fourth novel, *Those Who Don't Sleep*, is no longer Amaia Salazar but a very inquisitive young woman, Nash Elizondo. An archaeologist and anthropologist, but also a forensic psychologist, her profession is to "make the dead speak." A stark contrast separates her from Amaia, not only because Nash is not strictly speaking a police officer but a scientist, but also because their mothers are completely different. Dr. Elizondo—their mother—already appears, forty years before her death, as a very likeable young psychologist during the Bilbao floods (*Awaiting the Flood*). However, the investigation into her mother will not lead Nash to discover her own involvement in the murders she is investigating, unlike Amaia, for whom the personal and professional spheres are increasingly intertwined.



Nash exhumes two victims from the Legarra chasm, south of Elizondo. The first is Andrea Dancur, whose story and personality are described through numerous *flashbacks* in this fourth volume, alongside the psychological autopsy Nash conducts. Andrea was a young woman tormented

by an oppressive family environment she sought to escape during a very difficult late adolescence. She is murdered by Lisardo Murrieta.

The second victim is a witch, thrown into the same chasm 400 years ago with all the traditional ritual protections intended to prevent her return. Since her exhumation by archaeologists removes all these protections, her still-"alive" mummy will continue to pursue this same murderer, fully aware of what is on his trail even on his deathbed. The connection to another woman accused of witchcraft, this time during the civil war, whom Murieta's mother had burned alive, is easily understood. Continuity, also, with Andrea, whose mysterious appearances we will see, reminiscent of those of Anne Arbizu... The theme of witchcraft is thus central to this fourth volume, whereas it was only secondary in the previous novels.

Secondly, as Engrasi says, "the dead do what they can." And they seem to be able to do a lot.

This is the case with Anne Arbizu, who appears to Freddy (Vol. II, ch. 14, p. 238), but the dead are a constant presence in Amaia's dreams. Volume II gradually reveals that she is not dreaming of herself, but of her murdered twin sister. "Your sister is dead because you dream of her, you dream of the dead, Inspector Salazar" (Aloisius Dupree, Vol. II, p. 458, ch. 30). Is the introduction of a haunted cell phone a new form of fantastic storytelling? There is no record in the call log of this conversation, which took place with the phone switched off.



Is this about lucid dreaming? Amaia Salazar is in a state of consciousness very close to wakefulness, which doesn't fall under what we ordinarily call a dream, even though she lacks the freedom of movement and action that can characterize some lucid dreams. Noah Scott Sherrington mentions such work on himself (*Awaiting the Flood*, ch. 30, p. 314), and the mention of La Llorona in ch. 32 of the same novel evokes the same thing. Most of the time, Amaia is experiencing the dream, for example, in Vol. III, p. 146, where she is attacked by her mother. Although she is asleep, what she is clearly aware of as a dream seems quite real, and involves beings that are not at all imaginary or purely dreamlike.

The splendid dream recounted in Volume III (ch. 27, p. 272) features her sister, "no doubt a pure projection of her mind, because this little girl had never reached that age." But then, why was she already dreaming of it when she didn't know she had a twin sister murdered in her cradle by their mother? Other mythical creatures appear in this same dream: the duck-footed lamias on the river. Amaia has already encountered them while awake (Vol. II, p. 202, ch. 12). These lamias insistently

ask her to "wash away the offense" and "cleanse the river." This request recurs many times, for example when Amaïa, about to give birth, is plunged into a horrific nightmare where dozens of corpses lie on both banks of the river. She is again asked to clean it. For Amaïa is not quite like other people...



III - Amaïa Salazar

Like any human being, Amaïa Salazar displays weaknesses, and the flaws in her personality are carefully portrayed. She can be quite moody, angry, and struggles with the challenges of being a young mother, especially given her demanding job. She even becomes envious of how well James cares for their child, Ibai. She faces enormous difficulties, moments of doubt, and even failure in the pursuit of a long, very long investigation. The fact that she is seen strangely and seemingly enjoying cheating on her husband further highlights her humanity and her vulnerability to a particularly sinister magic that has befallen her, as we approach the conclusion of this story in which she is central.

However, is this really an ordinary human being?

Amaïa is a survivor, from the earliest age, from the cradle where she escapes death. Throughout her childhood, she is then pursued by death threats from a mother who hates her, makes no secret of it, and tells her before going to sleep that she won't kill her that night. Her father saves her life after a first murder attempt in which she ends up unconscious in a vat of flour that suffocates her. Entrusted to her aunt Engrasi, who protects her, her childhood continues rather sadly, in the solitude of an extremely bright student who is two years ahead in her schooling (*North Face of the Heart*, ch. 6 p. 117). At 12, she made the imprudent decision to wander for hours in the forest, eventually arriving at a property during a thunderstorm, where she was expected to be sacrificed. At that moment, she was struck by lightning. She was then mysteriously found, completely white and seemingly purified, on a path where a shepherd, and later her father, were able to save her, or rather, revive her. Was she not saved by lightning, by Mari, the goddess of storms?

Engrasi arranged for her exile in the United States for her safety, no longer able to protect her from her mother. "This little girl is a survivor, and the force that kept her alive admits nothing but the truth" (*The North Face of the Heart*, ch. 75, p. 726). "When you survive, you learn to live. You no longer have a choice when you're dead" (*ibid.*, ch. 16, p. 187). Back in Spain, she pursued a career as a police officer in Pamplona, but an internship in the United States led to her being noticed by Aloisius Dupree, who saw in her the greatest quality an investigator can possess: *intuition*.

At the beginning of the trilogy, Amaïa displays a perfectly rational approach to her duties as a police officer and investigator, paying little heed to her aunt's beliefs, even though she sometimes agrees to have her tarot cards read. She is seen explicitly rejecting these beliefs as mere superstitions (*The North Face of the Heart*, p. 215, ch. 20).

Volume I thus depicts the journey of a "disbeliever" who is granted encounters with two of her people's principal mythical creatures. She meets the *basajaun*, the invisible guardian, three times (Vol. I, ch. 36, p. 395; Vol. II, ch. 32, p. 483; Vol. III, ch. 18, p. 153). Each encounter is a deeply moving experience; the third meeting likely saves her life.

She does not recognize the goddess Mari at the entrance to a cave not far from Elizondo (Vol. I, ch. 39), and will later dismiss this identification as pure superstition. This strange young woman, however, gave her a central key to her investigation, which will take on its full meaning in the following volume: she showed him the cave of the tarttalo.

Amaïa's long inner transformation throughout this very long narrative is a continuation of the presence and experience of death. "One can draw from it colossal strength, extraordinary capacity and discernment" (Vol. II, ch. 14, p. 228), Engrasi tells her during a card reading. These cards clearly show the two deities in what is clearly a destiny that Amaïa does not accept: "It is the same curse that chose me before my birth. The one that haunts my dreams, with the dead leaning over my bed, with guardians of the forest or storm maidens. All of this is a waste of time" (*ibid.*).

But later in the same story, we see Amaïa taking a stone with the intention of returning to the same cave, which is empty. Immediately afterward, she fails to recognize Mari when she picks up a young pregnant woman (Vol. II, ch. 32, p. 484) who leaves in her car the stone she had left as an offering at the cave's entrance.

Later, when her investigation begins to encounter enormous difficulties, she will seek comfort by returning to the place of her first encounter with the Lady (T. III ch. 27 p. 269) and she will feel her invisible and reassuring touch.

Amaïa, at the end of this long journey, arrives at the conclusion of the presence of supernatural forces invoked through child sacrifice and witchcraft, as she expresses in a crucial meeting with Engrasi (Vol. III, Chapter 31, p. 313). The police investigation and Amaïa's own personality are thus closely intertwined. We are not dealing with the external perspective of a police investigation gradually taking hold of an investigator, but rather with the increasingly profound immersion of this investigator as she discovers her personal involvement, becoming ever clearer about the extent of her own involvement through her increasingly intimate relationship with the true culprit.

IV – The Monsters

There are criminals we haven't mentioned yet, because they are the ones behind all this horror. These include Fina Hidalgo, the midwife of death; Dr. Berasategui, who embodies Tarttalo; Rosario Iturzaeta, the witch and Amaïa's mother; and above all, Judge Xabier Markina Tabese, who has been pulling all the strings from the start.

It all began a long time ago, in the heart of the 15th century, most likely during the plague epidemic. Someone awakens an ancient demon named Inguma, who drinks the souls of sleepers and children, "stealing their breath while they sleep" (Volume III, p. 45, ch. 5). The old Inés Ballerena, a keeper of memories whose little girl has just been sacrificed and who is mistaken for a madwoman, clearly states about it. "One of those indomitable women who had lived through the century and still had the strength to put their hair in a bun every morning, to cook, and to feed the animals." Father Sarasola identifies the presence of Inguma, under various names, in numerous cultures throughout the ages (Volume III, ch. 13, p. 105). When did it returned in Baztán?



In the 1970s, Xabier Tabese appeared in Baztán and founded several meditation groups, or rather sects, which quickly turned to human sacrifice once their members were sufficiently prepared. They murdered infants, who at that age "move between two worlds and can see and hear what is happening on both sides," as Jonan explains (Vol. III, ch. 13, p. 105). An anonymous witness, protected by the Catholic hierarchy, gave Amaïa a full testimony:

"The victim must be under two years old, a girl, and unbaptized (...). The sacrifice to evil in Inguma consists of depriving them of air and then offering their body. Those who practice these sacrifices get what they want from them: money, wealth, revenge..." (Vol. III, ch. 43, p. 450). Amaïa has been investigating these murders from the start, which have continued unabated in several locations in the Baztán Valley. For example, the year of Amaïa's birth, on a remote farm in the forest north of Elizondo (Vol. III, ch. 36, p. 367).

In this same farmhouse, now a heavily guarded property, Dr. Berasategui will lead bereavement support groups. Inspector Montes will discuss the anger therapy he underwent with this

same doctor, a therapy that aims only to conceal anger and not at all to control it (Vol. II, ch. 37, p. 538 and 39, p. 569). Victor Oyarzabal, like all the criminals who committed suicide in the second novel, such as Ramon Quiralte and Jason Medina, was among his patients. They all wrote Tarttalo's name on the walls in letters of blood or excrement before their suicides (beginning of Volume II), as Rosario Iturzaeta also did.

Tarttalo is a monstrous giant cyclops living in a cave not far from humans, a cannibal who hoards mountains of bones in his cave of Arri Zahar (according to Jonan's description in Volume II, Chapter 6, p. 94. Barandiaran mentions him in his works). Amaïa describes the cave, emptied of its bones, in Volume II, Chapter 12, p. 201. "Tarttalo needs to sign the crimes of others to assert that he is the true perpetrator of their actions" (Volume II, p. 307, Chapter 17). It is he whom Mari sees entering the cave carrying bones, the *mairu-beso*: the arms he has taken from the corpses of the young girls who were victims of the crimes he ordered.



The very human form of the psychiatrist Berasategui is the mask, or the modern shape, of Tarttalo. His identity, like his guilt, is concealed at length throughout volume II.

He will be driven to suicide in prison at the beginning of volume III.

Fina Hidalgo, the midwife of death, reveals her true witchy face when Amaïa hurls the magical defense "alone forever" at her (Vol. II, ch. 24, p. 403). It's impossible to say how many infants she sacrificed at birth under the guise of her obstetric practice, but she clearly covered up the murder of Amaïa's sister in her cradle. These babies were sacrificed by suffocation, as Inguma dictated. A search of her home proved fruitless because she had been tipped off and had already burned everything that could serve as evidence or even information (Vol. III, ch. 23, p. 223). Amaïa suspects all her colleagues of leaking, without, of course, being able to suspect Judge Markina. We learn of her suicide by hanging in the very last pages of the trilogy (ch. 57, p. 577).

Rosario Iturzaeta harbors a deep hatred for her daughter Amaïa, a continuation of the murder she was unable to commit when she killed her twin sister at birth, as previously mentioned. Engrasi clearly perceives this: "Juan, your wife is a genuine witch" (*The North Face of the Heart*, ch. 75, p. 730). Father Sarasola is equally clear: "Your mother is not possessed, she is wicked, and her soul is as dark as night" (Vol. II, p. 299, ch. 17), rendering any exorcism futile.

Elena Ochoa is very clear about the transformation of her former friend through contact with witchcraft practices and sacrifices (*The Legacy of the Bones*, ch. 24, p. 410). But did the sect truly transform her best friend, or did it reveal her true self? "When she was little, she was a ray of sunshine, always happy, always singing," says her sister Angela (Vol. II, ch. 28, p. 426).

Committed to a psychiatric hospital for years, she actually receives no medication thanks to Berasategui, who poses as her son. At the end of the second volume, he helps her escape from the clinic, and together they kidnap Amaia's child to sacrifice him in his cave, believing Ibañ to be a girl. She disappears, presumed drowned in the river, but lives hidden away on the same large, isolated property in the forest that housed the original sect.

She slits her throat at the reception of the psychiatric clinic at the end of volume III (ch.50 p. 482).

All these suicides are, of course, orchestrated by the same person who killed Jonan Exaide and caused the car accident that nearly cost Nadia Takchenko her life: Judge Markina, or Xabier Tabese, who has been present since the beginning of the trilogy. Having done everything to seduce Amaia, their sexual relationship in the third volume is clearly abnormal, contradicting everything we've seen of Amaia, who is so invested in her relationship with James and her motherhood. This is an expression of his power of influence, the effects of which we only ever perceive, because at no point do we see him directly act and cause the suicides of the other murderers, who know him well. Magic? Telepathy or the power of suggestion, from a distance? Bewitchment? We will never know.

Dolores Redondo thus reveals details about him gradually, leaving it to the reader to piece together the rather chilling picture of a true monster. The visit to his "mother," Sara Duran, very much alive and institutionalized for 20 years, is harrowing (Vol. III, ch. 50, p. 504). Plunged into madness, she nevertheless declares herself very clearly still in love with her husband. She identifies him using a photo of Judge Markina, who is believed to be his son. Her only child was a stillborn girl.

Is he a sorcerer? A vampire? All of these at once and something else? His youth is a recurring theme, particularly in Volume III: the souls of sacrificed girls on which he feeds grant this youth to him. We will never know exactly who he is, nor where he comes from. A fragment of clothing that Jonan managed to tear from him before dying can be attributed to a tailor "known for dressing knights and nobility since the time of Henry VIII" (Vol. III, ch. 55, p. 550).

"He is a demon, a born seducer, the epitome of masculinity, the great seducer" (Vol. III, last chapter, p. 575) and presents himself as "the bearer of a powerful and ancient religion that originates in the valley, beneath the stones upon which your village is built. A power that surpasses your imagination and that must be nurtured" (p. 571). This power is Inguma.

These final revelations take place in Tabese's vault amidst a monstrous storm, an expression of Mari's unleashed fury. Inspector Iriarte will bring the sorcerer's long life to an end by saving Amaia.

V - Interpretations

At the end of this lengthy analysis, two questions arise: do monsters exist outside of our beliefs, and what freedom do we have in the face of this monstrosity that dwells within us? Or, what are these novels telling us about?

First, monsters certainly have their significance in Basque culture and identity, which is perhaps the fundamental subject Dolores Redondo addresses. But Inguma has a transcultural existence. Traces of it can be found in Japan, the Philippines, and even more specifically among the Hmong people in the Far East (Vol. III, ch. 13, p. 107). Father Sarasola shares these beliefs as both a man of the Church and a psychiatrist. His description of these hundreds of mysterious deaths is a

powerful argument against a whole trend in modern psychology that seeks to reduce monsters to a purely internal dimension of humankind, particularly cultural and sexual. He provides the central argument against resorting to Freud in the interpretation of criminality and especially of evil (*The Legacy of the Bones*, ch. 17, p. 299): "Evil exists, it is there, and you know as well as I do that your mother is not simply mentally ill."

Did Rosario Iturzaeta willingly let evil into her? "Your mother was fascinated, she liked the clandestine meetings, secret group aspect. (...) I realized that she had been brainwashed" (*The Legacy of the Bones* ch. 24 p. 412).

The Baztán sects were founded in the context of the psychedelic experiments of the 1970s, to exploit this then-fashionable curiosity. An interesting analysis is developed by a contemporary researcher, David Dupuis, whose conclusions raise precisely the questions we are facing. We mention this work precisely because, having nothing to do with Basque culture, it highlights the universal, that is to say, human, scope of the problem.

"Several paradigms have been used to explain the effects produced by psychedelic substances like ayahuasca. First, there's the culturalist hypothesis, theorized notably by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, for whom these experiences are shaped by our cultural frameworks—for example, a Catholic might be more likely to have visions of the Virgin Mary. The neurobiological hypothesis proposes to explain these effects by the pharmacological properties of the substances. The psychological hypothesis analyzes these experiences as the projection of contents present in the depths of our psyche. Finally, the realist position maintains that the entities encountered truly exist, and that ayahuasca is simply a kind of key allowing us to unlock dimensions of reality that are usually invisible ¹." Fascinating, isn't it?

What is Dolores Redondo's position as expressed in her novels? Do monsters exist independently of our beliefs, or is it our beliefs that give them existence? To put it another way: do God, or the Gods, exist because we believe in them, and if so, what power do our minds and cultures lend to what we have created? If collective memory is systematically used as the foundation of culture throughout these narratives, is this memory grounded in a collective unconscious? We have mentioned Freud's very clear rejection, but Carl Gustav Jung is never mentioned; perhaps this is regrettable. "Certain concrete places and locations act as a kind of magnet for crime, because they represent a universal memory common to all mankind, and they explain their behavior" (Quote from Nash Elizondo's *Etiology of Crime, Those Who Don't Sleep*, Saturday, March 14, p. 405).

In *The North Face of the Heart* (ch. 52, p. 558), voodoo sorcery gives us pause for thought. "Medora is sick because she believes in it. During the zombification ceremony, the *bokor* manages to convince his victim that she is dead." Did Xabier Tabese give Amaia Salazar's mother a choice before she became a truly malevolent witch? Or was this choice, in any case, ingrained in her nature, rendering the question of her freedom meaningless? While poor Medora is a victim of her culture, it is at the very least troubling to portray Rosario Iturzaeta as a victim. She is clearly responsible for what she then does to her friend Elena Ochoa, who is murdered by walnuts. These are not simply a symbol of the witch's power but a very real weapon that kills inexplicably. Is the terror in which poor Elena lives enough to explain why her entire digestive tract is invaded by nutshells that are killing her?

If witchcraft exists, does the same apply to monsters and gods?

What is clear is that Dolores Redondo doesn't resolve the issue but leaves it wide open for the reader. He was able to follow Amaia's long journey, which began with total disbelief at what she perceived as a collection of superstitions.

¹ https://www.lemonde.fr/le-monde-des-religions/article/2026/06/07/david-dupuis-anthropologue-les-personnes-qui-viennent-au-perou-rencontrer-l-ayahuasca-sont-des-pelerins-au-meme-titre-que-des-chretiens-se-rendant-a-lourdes_6698663_6038514.html

“Amaia, what really matters, whether something is proven or whether so many people believe it?” (Ros, Volume I, Chapter 16, p. 157, referring to the work of Father Barandiaran). This encapsulates the anthropological perspective on Basque identity. In the same passage, Ros mentions the belief in Mari’s power to give a child to women who place a stone at his shrine, which is precisely what Amaia will do, though not with that intention. Her pregnancy is the conclusion of the first novel. A mere ambiguity of a belief?

Conclusions

Euskal Herria, the Basque Country, is both the setting and perhaps the subject of this captivating story. Dolores Redondo begins her trilogy by describing it, in chapter 12, where Amaia returns to this place that is part of her like a genetic imprint and from which she had always wanted to leave. The description goes back to the origins, mentions the epidemic of 1440, and above all, the effort of adaptation, of merging between humans and the initially hostile Earth. The scene closes under the rain that never truly leaves the entire story.

The presence of magic or the supernatural is constant, expressing a "Baztán syndrome that leads people to validate certain beliefs" (*Those Who Don't Sleep*, Saturday, March 14, p. 443). Among these are the Eguzkilo, the dried flower of the wild thistle that is glued to the door of the house to ward off evil, and the *gaueko*, spirits of the night (*North Face of the Heart*, p. 577, ch. 56). The observant tourist will encounter them in Arizkun, Elizondo, and elsewhere. They can also observe the Botil Harri on the town hall, a stone that symbolizes the past and gives strength to whoever touches it. Amaia does that, taking care not to be seen (Vol. II, p. 168, ch. 9). The houses are surrounded by the corridor of souls, called Itxusuria (*North Face of the Heart*, ch. 6). And so many other references to beliefs and attachment to the supernatural that make up this identity.



Is Baztán, the tranquil valleys, a land of witches? Belagile is their ancient name; today they are called Sorgin. "I call witch that manifestation of the popular spirit which supposes that certain people are endowed with extraordinary properties, by virtue of their magical knowledge or their communication with infernal powers." (Barandiaran). There are countless legends in the Basque Country in which witches appear as an essential element of the beliefs and fears of the ancestors.

Investigator Alonzo Salazar Frias crisscrossed the Baztán region and concluded that what was happening there was not related to Satanism (Vol. III, Chapter 31, p. 311). The Zugarramurdi cave is mentioned in the same passage.



The beings at the heart of these beliefs are not all malevolent demons; quite the contrary. We have already mentioned the discreet but constant presence of the duck-footed lamias that Amaïa encounters on a bridge in the forest. They are concerned with balance, harmony, and the purity of nature, as is the guardian of the forest, the *basajaun*, of whom Ros gives us a very clear description (Vol. I, ch. 16, p. 154). Protector of humans and flocks, he signals himself with a deep whistle. He is "the guardian of harmony, the lord of the forest, the one who preserves the balance between life and death" (Vol. III, ch. 31, p. 308). His gaze upon the valley closes the first film. Amaïa will always emerge profoundly at peace from her encounters with this mysterious being who remains ever-hidden yet undeniably present.

There is *never* any abandonment. The Gods of the Basque people are always very much present.

Mari remains the most mysterious figure. An elegant woman, a cave dweller, she never declares herself a goddess. Equally powerful in storms, tempests, and lightning, she presides over the destiny of Amaïa, whom she has made her chosen one. Dolores Redondo declares herself her chronicler, revealing Mari as the soul of the Basque people, the true subject of this fascinating series of novels.



YVES POTIN 2026