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## Piecing Together the Puzzle of Contemporary Spanish Fiction: A Translation and Critical Analysis of Fricciones by Pablo Martín Sánchez

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Piecing Together the Puzzle of Contemporary Spanish Fiction:  
A Translation and Critical Analysis of *Fricciones* by Pablo Martín Sánchez

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
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## Introduction

There are roughly seven thousand languages that exist in our world. One can imagine that precisely because of this, a piece of literature written in only one language has limited global coverage. *Fricciones* (2011), a collection of short fiction stories written by contemporary Spanish author, Pablo Martín Sánchez, has never before been translated into English. In this project, I have translated an assorted collection of twelve of Martín Sánchez's *relatos*<sup>1</sup>. It is my hope with these translations to shed light on *Fricciones* and to open an international dialogue regarding the work. I strive to bridge the gap between Spanish and English, and to reconstruct the fantastical literary puzzle that Martín Sánchez created in a new, relatable context for an English reader.

Pablo Martín Sánchez was born in 1977 in a small town called Reus, near Barcelona. In college he studied literary theory, drama, and humanities, and initiated his involvement in literature magazines such as *Verbigracia*, *La Siega*, and *Rinconete*. Following his passion for French language and culture, Martín Sánchez finished his doctoral studies in Lille, France. There he focused his thesis on Oulipo (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle), a French literary movement that was founded in the 1960s. Oulipo was a workshop group of authors and artists, like Georges Perec and Italo Calvino, who took a unique stance against the traditional novel format and played with themes and structure in order to transform literature into a more engaging and meaningful experience for the reader. Martín Sánchez's interest and involvement with Oulipo has inspired his professional career as he has published collective works about the movement, and used the Oulipo ideals as a foundation for the construction of his own fictional world in *Fricciones*.

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<sup>1</sup> The Spanish word *relato* means "short story". During this project, I will be using this word in order to reference the stories that I translated from *Fricciones*.

It is best to not think of Oulipo as a literary group or movement, but more so a mindset that has influenced many contemporary authors to stray from the traditional nineteenth century romantic notion of fiction. Author Pablo Ruíz explains in his book, *Four Cold Chapters on the Possibility of Literature (Leading Mostly to Borges and Oulipo)* that Oulipians focused their work more on the “parallel between artistic creation and play”(95). Ruíz refers to the Oulipo writing experience as an “experiment” of which the author is in control and has the ability to break rules and then renew them: “He who experiments is setting new rules, rejecting “the old game” and creating a new one” (108). This explains the groundwork of *Fricciones*. Many critics, along with Martín Sánchez himself, have voiced the same opinion that *Fricciones* more closely resemble a literary puzzle than a formal fiction work. Martín Sánchez says that *Fricciones* can be considered an Oulipo work because it “responds to the constraint” of writing, and “fragments the idea of writing into rewriting and making friction with other authors”. The “rules” that Ruíz mention as an intrinsic quality of Oulipo experimentation directly parallel the “constraints” that Martín Sánchez refers to.

Since being published five years ago, *Fricciones* has been well received by Spanish readers as it has received numerous prizes and has been highly praised by critics and scholars. José Luis Amores directly compares Martín Sánchez with the Argentine short-story fiction masters Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) and Julio Cortázar (1914-1984): “He leído pocos *relatos* tan buenos, aparte los de Borges y Cortázar” (“I have read few stories as good as these, apart from Borges and Cortázar”<sup>2</sup>) (Amores). Martín Sánchez has created *Fricciones* as a direct inspiration of response to the writing styles, themes, and techniques used by both authors, but

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<sup>2</sup> From now on, the reader should be aware that when a Spanish quote is directly followed by the English version in parentheses, that this is my translation of the text derived from the original source.

especially Borges. The title *Fricciones* is an unequivocal allusion to Borges's most popular collection of short stories, *Ficciones* (1944). While it is almost impossible to pinpoint Borges's career in a group or literary movement, his fantastical elements, and explorative tendencies seem to line up with those of Oulipo. Inspired by a typographical error in the publishing of Borges's book, Martín Sánchez's *Fricciones* explores similar themes that Borges plays with in *Ficciones*, including identity conflict, metaphysical exploration, human obsession, and puzzles. *Fricciones*, as well as *Ficciones*, can both be viewed as representations of the author's creative intent to challenge the limitations of the short story genre and to focus on the advantages of writing more exploratory and experimental fiction literature.

The title, *Fricciones*, while also being a clever play on Borges, grabs the attention of the reader and raises questions about the content of the book and the intent of the author. A fusion of the two Spanish words, "fricciones" ("frictions") and "ficciones" ("fictions"), the title creates a dynamic relationship between two separate concepts for the reader to analyze. In this way, Martín Sánchez begins the journey of the reader even before opening to the first page, preparing the reader for what is to come. Juan Soto Ivanés refutes this concept in his critique and explains that the title refers to "two elements that one finds in the book" (Soto Ivanés). By combining the words and keeping the letter *r* lowercase, Martín Sánchez introduces that there is a correlation between the movement and resistance within a literary context and the literature itself. He also creatively hints that fiction has the ability to create friction, and that friction occurs within Martín Sánchez's friction, because the *relatos* intersect, intertwine, and form a whole. With this title Martín Sánchez insinuates his play with the limitations of fiction because in *Fricciones* he pushes the blurry lines of genre and mixes imagination with reality. When thinking of this idea



of friction occurring in fiction, the reader should keep the puzzle metaphor in mind. He or she can imagine each instance of intersection in the *relatos* as moments when the edges of puzzle pieces come into contact, and satisfyingly click into place.

Along with using Borges and the Oulipo mindset as inspiration, Martín Sánchez also takes advantage of the short story, fiction genre to tailor the *Fricciones* experience. One of the benefits of writing *Fricciones* as a collection of *relatos* is that it has the power to be read whole as a novel, or as separate stories. This hybrid genre permits a certain degree of flexibility, as the reader may choose his or her level of involvement and commitment with the text. The *relatos* differ in length, anywhere from a page and a half to seventeen pages. They also vary in topics, characters, and plotlines; however, every story seems to share common themes of death, loneliness, and madness. This subtle bond between the *relatos* creates an unspoken dialogue of repetitive experiences that occurs when the stories intersect. While at first, the combination of death, loneliness, and madness may strike the reader as heavy and pessimistic, the tone is compromised and complemented by Martín Sánchez's use of humor, fantasy, and irony. This casual tone and use of fantasy, humor, and irony lightens the general tone and enables him to speak of such weighty human experiences. Death, loneliness, and madness reappear discreetly throughout the book and force the reader to question both the author's original intent and the suggestive relationship between the *relatos*. This unique, fragmented structure of the *relatos* also allows Martín Sánchez to show his creativity in other ways, by making a metaphorical puzzle out of his literature. The reading experience of *Fricciones* can be viewed through the perspective that each piece of the puzzle is an individual, self-sufficient *relato*. And when taken into

consideration together, the pieces combine and create a larger universal picture that any reader can relate to, regardless of language..

Along with the presence of death, loneliness, and madness, another common theme that Martín Sánchez emphasizes throughout *Fricciones* is that of unity. This physical challenge of unity is confronted by the brevity and fragmentation of the *relato*. The Spanish critic Pablo Nacach remarks that these *relatos* are “united by that which separates them” (Nacach). While one may think that twenty-seven separate short stories appear disconnected, in reality, it is precisely this fragmentation that brings them together. The *relatos* tend to only be subtly connected. Throughout the reading experience the reader stumbles upon these moments of friction and strive to unravel how the stories relate and eventually unite. These small moments of friction often aren’t realized until after reading, they create a web of similar experiences that inconspicuously unite the stories. The discontinuous, puzzle-piece nature of *Fricciones* requires that the reader involves him or herself within the text, putting together pieces of the puzzle and becoming part of the experience.

Not only does Martín Sánchez focus on the moments of intersection between the *relatos*, but also the smaller connections that exist between a character and his or her surrounding society. He is interested in examining the moments when human lives intersect, and the ways in which the microcosm of the internal human psyche fits into the the macrocosm of the external network of human experiences. For example, in “Slumber”, a man wakes up in a world where every other human is asleep. In this *relato*, the theme of loneliness makes the reader question what it means to be an individual part of an unresponsive society. Along with analyzing these moments of intersection between man and society, Martín Sánchez also examines the friction

that occurs when man does not “fit” into society. By emphasizing the function of the individual and the independent pieces that constitute a society, Martín Sánchez questions unity on both a human level and a larger societal scale.

In the same manner that Martín Sánchez strives to create a shared experience for every reader, I want to provide the reader with a clear understanding of the theoretical foundation behind translation and a compelling literary exploration of the themes that appear in *Fricciones*. This project is structured in three chapters that aim to engage the reader in a unique text and provide him or her with a new perspective on the difficulty and necessity of translation. The first chapter consists of two sections: the first contextualizes the technical literary framework of *Fricciones*, and the second offers external scholarly opinions on the theories and function of translation. With this framework in mind, in the second chapter the reader will find the *relatos* translated in English. Lastly, the third and final chapter is separated into two parts. The first part includes an exploration of my translation process, the philosophies that I employed during the process and the specific challenges that emerged while working with such a multifaceted and interwoven text as *Fricciones*. Finally, the second section of Chapter III consists of a detailed examination of the writing styles and common themes in Martín Sánchez’s work. Furthermore, I will examine how fiction and friction relate, the subtle connections between the *relatos*, and their application to the individual in a larger-scale, societal context.

## Chapter 1: A Theoretical Framework: Oulipo and *Fricciones*

In this chapter I introduce the intellectual foundation and technical approaches that have been involved in creating both this project and the original work, *Fricciones*. In reference to the literary choices that were made in the original, Martín Sánchez bases some of his techniques and his writing style on the philosophical foundation of Oulipo, but he also focuses many of his *relatos* on his own independent opinion that writing mostly consists of rewriting. In order to offer a well-rounded contextual knowledge of the theories that have influenced Martín Sánchez, I explore the philosophical foundation for the Oulipo theory and how it applies specifically to *Fricciones*. Furthermore, I discuss how Martín Sánchez uses his humor, creative pronouns, casual tone to develop a bond not only between him and the reader, but also between the reader and the characters, in order to involve him or her into the fictional world and create a puzzle of shared experiences. In reference to this project, the choices that I made while translating are based off of certain fundamental theories of translation. In the second part of the chapter, I will address these theoretical philosophies on translation and explain how these concepts have shaped my opinion and the final product.

### Part I: Martín Sánchez's Inspiration and Literary Techniques

One of the puzzle pieces that Martín Sánchez uses to construct the *Fricciones* narrative is the flexibility and creativity that stems from the Oulipo mindset. The groundwork for the construction of *Fricciones* was directly inspired by Martín Sánchez's scholarly research on and application of Oulipo. In his thesis from La Universidad de Granada, Martín Sánchez explains the beliefs of the Oulipo members and clarifies the common goal to break down the traditional

literary tendencies in order to focus more on the journey or process of the work, and less on the final product itself. He comments that, “A Oulipo no le interesa tanto la literatura como producto acabado, sino la búsqueda de su potencialidad, de su capacidad para convertirse en acto” (“Oulipo is not so interested in literature as a finish product, but more so the search of its potential and capacity to transform itself in the act”) (Martín Sánchez 88). This quote helps the reader understand that the ultimate Oulipo intent is to push the boundaries of genre and embrace the constraints that are placed on the author.

*Fricciones* is a perfect example of the Oulipo format, or lack thereof. Martín Sánchez achieves in establishing the unique Oulipian ideals of wordplay, disorienting narrative changes, absurd, dream-like descriptions, and anti traditional experimentation of writing. In an online video interview, Martín Sánchez never uses the words “book” or “literature”; however, he frequently refers to *Fricciones* as a “puzzle,” a “game,” or a “collage”. These imaginative words form the basic foundation for the creative construction of the *relatos* and the involvement that is required from the reader. Generally speaking, with puzzles and games, also comes an implication that there is work to be done. This fact promotes the idea that reading *Fricciones* is less a routine process, but an entertaining and engaging exploration. In addition, an essential part of a game or puzzle are the rules that structure the experience. Martín Sánchez establishes the active engagement of both the author and reader, and thus captures the ultimate goal of Oulipo followers as they strive to break these rules of traditional form and move into a more experimental and artistic literary realm.

With this Oulipo strategy in mind, Martín Sánchez creates this literary puzzle for the very reason of being deconstructed and pieced together again. Therefore, each reader can feel involved

in the piece and can find his or her own sense of artistic creation, undoubtedly taking into account his or her own personal experiences. In his thesis statement, Martín Sánchez uses three words to describe the Oulipo intent, which are all clearly reflected in *Fricciones*: fragmentation, multi-sequentiality, and interactivity of the reader (90). Each of these words relate to the specific *Fricciones* experience. The fragmentation is visible in the constant stopping and starting of the *relatos*. The feeling of multi-sequentiality stems from the fact that the *relatos* consecutively follow one after another without interruption. This format promotes the involvement, or as Martín Sánchez says, the “interactivity” of the reader.

While the *relatos* are all different and separate to an extent, most of them are centralized around three shared themes of loneliness, death, and madness. The heavy weight that comes with these themes is balanced by the peculiar use of pronouns and the creative collection of protagonists. Each *relato* in *Fricciones* has a different protagonist, and with this mix of characters and the free rein of pronoun use, Martín Sánchez strategically leaves himself unlimited with first, second, and third person narratives. The subjects of the *relatos* seems to rotate, as Martín Sánchez tells stories of other characters, yet at times, uses the second person pronoun, *you* to create a straight forward dialogue between the narrator and the reader. This same “interactivity” mentioned before is reinforced by this technique of engaging the reader and directly pulling him or her into Martín Sánchez’s dramatic fiction world.

When Martín Sánchez writes using the second person pronoun he imposes an experience on the reader and projects his own imagination into the mind and life of the reader. For example, in “The Solitude of Mirrors”, the Spanish verbs are conjugated in the *tú* (you) form, which is apparent from even the first sentence, “Coges un espejo y lo pones encima de la mesa” (“You

grab a mirror and put it on the table”) (38). In this direct and detailed approach of speaking to the reader, Martín Sánchez not only grabs the reader’s attention, but also establishes a connection and commands him or her to take part in the story. In the rest of the *relato*, the protagonist, who is *you* (the reader) goes crazy playing with an old mirror and begins to question the past until they can no longer recognize his or her own present reflection. While this technique of including the reader in the story may initially seem manipulative, it is a strategy that Martín Sánchez uses to invoke responsibility and character onto the reader in order to draw him or her deeper into the narrative. By projecting experiences on the reader, he makes his fiction come to life.

Along with using the second person pronoun, Martín Sánchez also writes in the first person plural narrative, *nosotros* (we). This pronoun usage can be seen as a direct and inclusive invitation into the text and is found within the first sentence of “The Underlined is Yours”: “Imaginemos a un lector leyendo al anochecer. Supongamos que el lector es tú...” (“Let’s imagine someone reading at night. Let’s imagine that this reader is you...” (26). In this sense, Martín Sánchez immediately establishes a relationship with the reader, inviting him or her to be involved in the work. By shares the artistic liberty with the reader, Martín Sánchez welcome he or she to be a part of the creative literary process. What is important about Martín Sánchez’s creative use of pronouns is the dynamic conversation and bond that it creates between the author and the reader, a form of mutual and cooperative involvement throughout the *relatos* that fuels the readers to fulfil his or her responsibility to continue reading.

Another literary technique that Martín Sánchez uses to counterbalance such heavy, existential themes to his casual tone and ironic sense of humor. The way that Martín Sánchez communicates with the reader is in a relaxed and matter of fact tone, which maintains the

relationship of trust between him and the reader. In a creatively disturbing *relato* about death, “Looking at the Flowers from the Side of the Roots”, Martín Sánchez turns a somewhat morbid situation into a laid-back, sarcastic joke. The protagonist, “you”, wake up and smell death. Martín Sánchez describes the odor of death: “No es que sea un olor desagradable, tal vez un poco agrio, como de queso rancio, pero en todo caso soportable” (“It’s not that it’s such an unpleasant odor, perhaps a little bitter, like stale cheese, but in any case, it’s bearable”) (19). This recurring sarcastic sense of humor that Martín Sánchez includes in his *relatos* tells the reader something about him on a personal level, and also lightens up the tone of the book as he asks the readers to join him in what is in fact a playful and insightful literary exploration.

## Part II: Theories on Translation

Just as it is necessary for the reader to understand the literary approaches behind the work, it is also important to have a sense of the fundamental theories and conflicts that are involved in translating a collection of short stories. The function of translation is a highly disputed topic because of the two different faces, the corporate and practical side of translation versus the more creative and artistic. Translation is also a conflicting topic of conversation because some argue that fiction translation is ultimately “impossible”. In this section, I will provide the reader with context of what goes into a successful translation, how translation is viewed in the eyes of other scholars, and also how these opinions relate to my experience with *Fricciones*.

Needless to say, the role of the translator is complicated because recreating a new piece of literature requires enough language skills and cultural knowledge to understand how the



original version conveys to the initial readership and accommodate to varying cultural norms. It requires great amounts of time and effort on the part of the translator, along with the ability to rationalize the elements that are most important to the original text. Similar to writing a new piece of literature, translating is a long, artistic process that requires an equally persistent and patient creative mindset. But what remains significant for any translator, is not only that the final product seems clear and coherent, but mainly that it reproduces the same “essence” and mood that the reader initially experiences while reading the original.

There are many difficulties when translating a piece as complex and multi-faceted as *Fricciones*. Questions about loyalty, flexibility, and transparency always come into play when one reads a translation. It is challenging for a translation to both appear coherent as an independent piece of art and to successfully recreate the spirit of the original work, without outshining the original. It is also challenging for translators to find the right balance on the scale of loyalty in translation. On one side of the equation, is the overly faithful translator who translates more literally, by intending to make a copy of the original, aiming for absolute precision and coherency. On the other side, is the more experimental translator, who aims to recreate a new lens or perspective of the original, in order to produce the same spirit as the original and construct a similar experience for a new reader. On this loyalty scale of a translation, it is easy for the translator to overstep boundaries, and the balance is delicate, that it could be thrown off with one incorrectly, or poorly interpreted idea.

With Martín Sánchez’s assortment of characters and themes, his witty humor and personal style, it is necessary while translating to be flexible, make sacrifices, and recreate only the most intrinsic components of the *Fricciones* experience. Every translation depends highly on

the style of the original, the mood, atmosphere, and requires an exchange of the personal and social experiences. Like translation theorist Eliot Weinberger says in his “Talk on Translation”:  
“Every reading of every poem is a translation into one’s own experiences and knowledge - whether it is a confirmation, a contradiction, or an expansion” (110). Because it is impossible for a translator to completely disregard and disconnect him or herself from any personal experiences, each reading or translation adds another layer of complexity to the overall piece. The translator does not want to leave such a mark that he or she interferes with the original intent; however, he or she also does not want to become invisible in the process.

Lawrence Venuti addresses this problem of translator interference in his book, *The Invisibility of the Translator*, along with how the invisibility of the translator is manifested in a cultural standard because people often disregard and under appreciate the work of translators. According to his opinion on translator interference, every reader (and translator) views a text through his or her own personal lens that depends on past experiences. Therefore, even in the same languages, each reader will associate words and interpret ideas differently. Venuti believes that the translator should not have to hide his or her own personal experience or become “invisible” within the translation, yet accept his or her role of bringing new life to a work, and aim to establish a equal balance of visibility and distance in order to not corrupt the original intent.

The well-known translation theorist Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) published an influential essay, “The Task of the Translator” (1923), in which he proposed a revolutionary philosophy of translation. Benjamin introduced an extremely thought-provoking and inciteful metaphor relating the fragmented nature of translation to a broken vessel. He equates the

preservation of meaning in translation as being fragments of a broken vessel, an idea that resonates coincidentally well with the *Fricciones* puzzle piece mentality. Benjamin explains the task of the translator to be one of retaining or preserving a “third universal language”:

Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not to be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of significance, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel. (Benjamin 79)

By creating this metaphor of translation, Benjamin is offering a new visual perspective for the reader to grasp the complicated reality of translation, that there may be no way to perfectly piece together a broken vase. The translation, while it strives to recreate the same essence as the original, it will never *be* the original. In Willis Barnstone’s book, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, and Practice*, he reviews Benjamin’s metaphor and suggests that “the repaired pieces need not match”; however, the ideal method of translation is to create a “gloss that insists on the correspondence of even the smallest linguistic units” (237). Translation must act as the glue that exists between and connects the two fragments of languages. If the translator breaks down language into the most fundamental pieces, he can use these fragments to recreate a new version for a different audience. Because translation is always a give and take of material, the small cracks that may remain visible in the broken vessel can represent the sacrifices and changes that the translator has been forced to make throughout the translation process.

In “The Task of the Translator”, Benjamin provides the reader with yet another approach to perceive translation as any artistic work that has its own lifetime and trajectory. He explains that each work of literature has its own lifecycle, and that an original work “undergoes a change” (74) so it can be reborn through translation: “A translation issues from the original - not so much from its life as from its afterlife” (73). This is a useful method to view translation, not as a only a similar version of the original, but as a rebirth, or continuation and opportunity for new life. In Barnstone’s explanation of Benjamin’s interpretation of translation as the afterlife, he clarifies that the function of translation is to “fulfill an original work’s life” (243), by “renewing the language” (245). By introducing this metaphor, Benjamin creates a visual timeline and encourages the reader to imagine each piece of literature as an artistic entity that is constantly adapting and changing to accommodate different audiences. Provided that the translation is seen as its own creative process, the final product receives more recognition and thus has the ability to correct the cultural blindness toward the translator’s efforts. This theory of translation as the afterlife of a work especially resonates with *Fricciones*, because it has never before been translated into English. It is in this way that my translation will shed new light on Martín Sánchez’s original, in the hope to bring attention and new life to *Fricciones*.

# FrICTIONS

by

Pablo Martín Sánchez

Translated by Madeleine Calhoun

## SLUMBER

I turn off the alarm clock with a slap and run out of the house without showering. In the elevator mirror I comb my hair as best as I can and realize that my eyes are still red and puffy from sleeping. As I pass by the doorman, he doesn't even lift up his head to say good morning. And when I get out into the street, I find a devastating surprise, that an epidemic of sleep has taken over the entire population. The vendor is asleep in his newsstand, and the mailman is lying on the sidewalk with his head resting against his truck. The cars are stopped in the middle of the road and the drivers have dozed off, now propped up by the steering wheel. And although absolute chaos prevails, the worst part is the unusual silence that makes the situation especially terrifying. I begin to run around screaming like a crazy person and trying to shake awake anyone that I find asleep. I make various phone calls, but no one on the other line responds. Worried and exhausted, I lean my forehead against the cold window of an electronics store and a couple of television screens display the same telling image: a morning newscaster surrendered to the universal sleep, sprawled out over the desk. I take off running. I wander for hours. Finally, trying to find an explanation, I climb on the hood of a car and flail my arms in the air. I scream, *what the fuck is going on?! And, from above, the only answer is a thundering snore that echoes "urbi et orbi"*.

## 9, RUE TRUFFAUT

When you get out of the metro you take the first right, and at the end of street, that next left. After that, you take the second right, and then you will find yourself on Rue Truffaut. Yes. Yes Truffaut, like the director. You live in #9, second floor, door 21. The spacious apartment has windows on both sides, so that the sun floods in during the whole day and even part of the night. The thick walls conserve heat during the winter, and keep in the cool air during the summer, and the wood floor brings a familiar warmth of childhood. The neighbors, modest yet attentive, greet you warmly when they run into you in the elevator and are always free to grab a cup of coffee. The landlord of the apartment is practically family, and Saturday afternoons he often challenges you to a chess match. Sometimes, if he beats you, or is just in a good mood, he lowers your rent. Through the streets people smile, happily, content to live in a place like this; they hug, laugh, jump, run, and talk lively. The bars are full, the metros are like happy underground worms that wriggle under your feet, and the sun shines cheerfully in the clear sky. So once you get back home after seeing all of this joy, you open the window and, smiling, you kill yourself.

## LOOKING AT FLOWERS FROM THE SIDE OF THE ROOTS

Imagine, imagine for a moment, that one day you wake up in the middle of night and smell death. Wait, it's not that *it* smells like death, no, but that *you* smell like death. You get up, go to the bathroom and...everything is normal. Except for that awful stench. Without question: *you* smell dead. The curious thing is that you've never smelled a dead person before. Of course, you've been to various funerals, including a couple of viewings, but you've never associated any specific smell with dead people. Anyway, now you're convinced that you smell like death. It's not that it's such an unpleasant odor, perhaps a little bitter, like stale cheese, but in any case, it's bearable. Plus, you feel fine, you don't notice anything strange. You pause to yawn and notice that your mouth is a little dry. You crack your knuckles. Everything is normal, except for that smell. Finally, you head back to bed and fall asleep immediately. When you wake up again, everything is dark and the stench of death is even more intense. You try to stretch out your arm to turn on the light, but your hand hits a wooden wall. Then you try to sit up, but your head smacks against an excessively low roof. There is no doubt about it: you're in a coffin. But what you don't know is whether they buried you alive, or if one can still think after death. Imagine, imagine that for a moment. And then, just forget about it.



## COMPOSITION I

This morning when I got out of bed I stepped on a spider and a smurf-colored mush came out, and I screamed as loud as I could, but neither my mom nor dad heard me because they were also screaming as loud as they could, and when I tried hard enough, a tear finally fell, which made me really happy because each time it gets more difficult for me to successfully fake cry and make it convincing, so then immediately after I actually got sad because I saw that the poor little spider was squashed and one of her legs moved almost like she was waving goodbye, and you know, I think that spiders understand better than humans that when someone dies, that they're not going anywhere, I felt so much grief for her that I began to cry for real, and all of a sudden, my parent's room went silent, but then my mom quickly started screaming again, like crazy, saying to my dad *if you ever put a hand on me again, I'll call the cops*, and this at first made me happy because the last time the cops came they let me put him in handcuffs, and then I threw the key out the window, and then I heard my mom scream *I'm taking the kid*, but this didn't make me too happy because the last time that I heard this I spent two months in my grandma's house, which was a real bore, my dad said *don't even start it you bitter whore* and then they ran to my room and grabbed me, one holding each arm, they started pulling in opposite directions as they insulted each other, saying horrible things that I didn't even understand because the pain in my armpits kept me from feeling anything, so then I also started screaming like crazy, telling them to let me go, that they should stop objectifying me in the name of the rights of self-determination, as a result they quieted down for a few seconds and looked at one another puzzled, but not long after they continued furiously lunging with one hand, leaving the other free to yank at each other's hair, and I told them that since they had such a developed sense

of propriety that they should just buy a dog and leave me in peace, but they didn't listen, and I started crying again because it hurt and they weren't listening, so in the end my mom won and told me *let's get out of here love*, she slammed the door when we left and I heard my dad yell *whore* and say to me that he loves me and he won't let anyone, *repeat anyone*, to keep me from him, and now I'm in a taxi on the way to court and the truth is I'm sad because with all of the hurry I didn't get the chance to say goodbye to the squashed spider, that with all of that mess she had stopped waving to me, she stayed really quiet as if trying to tell me it's best not to get involved in adult business, and thinking about her I began to cry for the last time... If I go back home and she's dead, I think I'll bury her.

## RIGOR MORTIS

She was wearing ripped jeans and an orange t-shirt with a Donald Duck logo. That's why I was shocked when she appeared in my room and said:

- Hello, I'm Death.

I had to buy time, so when I responded the first thing that came to mind was:

- Excuse me, but you're wrong: *I am Death.*

She was left stone cold, worried, as if she was trying to evaluate if the hour had arrived for her as well. She glanced over my blue Scrooge McDuck pajamas. It seemed like she understood everything, because she immediately responded:

- I'm sorry, I'm truly sorry... There must be an error. I'll revise my archives...
- No matter, it's fine - I told her with a wide smile while I quietly accompanied her towards the door - It'll be another time then.

She muttered another excuse and disappeared down the stairs. Then I quickly closed the door and ran towards the dresser in my room. I took out my hunting rifle and leaned myself against the window overlooking the street. When I saw that orange t-shirt leave the building I shot twice. And before she fell to the ground I screamed:

- I've never liked life tenure!

Fuck off, I thought while I closed the window. "That one was for my Uncle Anselmo." Then I went calmly back to the dresser, left the rifle, and began sorting through my clothes. A floral shirt and striped shorts stood out to me as the perfect combination for my new job. "The important thing is to stay under the radar" - I said to myself while looking in the mirror.

I went out to the street and got to work, already thinking about vacation.

## THE UNDERLINED IS YOURS

Tú, que me lees, ¿estás seguro de entender mi lenguaje?

*You, you read my work, but are you sure that you understand my language?*

- Jorge Luis Borges

Let's imagine a reader burying into a new book, staying up late at night. Let's suppose that the reader is you, sprawled out in bed. The story you read is "The Library of Babel" by Jorge Luis Borges. Let's say that you read it once, but don't really get it. Accepting that, you reread it and begin to analyze. You grab a pencil in case you might want to underline an important passage in order to understand it better. It doesn't take long for you to underline the first sentence. There is a curious footnote at the bottom of the page that says: *In order for a book to exist, it is sufficient that it be possible.* It's getting late and you should start to think about turning off the lights and heading to bed, but you can't resist the temptation of tackling a new chapter. This time you underline two sentences, which seem even more important to you than the last. Then, another reading surprises you with hidden feelings that just surfaced and that you hadn't even imagined. You keep reading and underlining. Long after the crack of dawn, you surrender to sleep as the pencil slips between your fingers and falls onto the tiled floor.

The next morning you wake up sweating, surprised to find that the Borges book has been thrown into the corner of the room and you have no recollection of how it got there. You shower quickly and head to work, forgetting about your late-night reading frenzy. That evening, you get home, slip off your shoes, stretch out on the couch, and turn on the TV. You quickly fall asleep. When you wake up, you immediately think of the Borges book and rush to your room to find it. The book is still sitting in the corner and the pencil remains at the foot of your bed. You start

reading it again and are surprised when you realize that last night you hadn't actually understood a word of what you read. So each sentence that you read again is like a new discovery, and it's hard for you to not want to underline them all.

Let's suppose that by the end of the week you have read the same Borges story more than thirty times and it is so marked up that it doesn't even make sense. Then you get to a part with a few unmarked sentences. You read them and notice that they too are significant, despite their trivial appearance (or perhaps that is the reason why they are significant). The marks seem to be smiling at you ironically. But you feel like you still hadn't exhausted all of the possibilities for butchering the book, and the truth is that, you actually feel like reading it again. So you start it from the beginning, and it takes little or no time for you to find another excellent sentence that you would like to underline. As if underlining it for a second time seems trashy, you decide to erase the past marks in a way that makes the text stand out from the rest. From then on, you begin erasing every interesting passage.

Let's imagine that you continue reading and erasing until only one sentence remains underlined. Let's say that the one sentence that remains is: *In order for a book to exist, it is sufficient that it be possible.* Only then you finally accept the fact that you had finished reading. And you finally recognize that this whole time you've been reading, you don't know whether you've been in heaven or hell.

## THE SOLITUDE OF MIRRORS

You grab a mirror and put it on the table. The mirror is round and small, perfect for a quick fix or makeup routine. It has a metallic frame and has two sides, one of which enlarges shown objects, and the other, reflects them on a normal scale. A silver stand with two lateral arms holds up the mirror, almost as if suspending it in air. The stand rotates, which makes it possible to go from one side to the other with a simple flip. The system is similar to that of a globe, but with a different axis and a weaker land mass, almost like the globe of another two-dimensional universe. You don't even remember which of your old lovers had forgotten it in the house before leaving and never coming back. Meanwhile, you put it on the table and observe that it is covered with dust, almost completely worn out from being untouched. Because a mirror that doesn't reflect anyone is like a book that no one reads: it doesn't exist. You're not precisely one who would look in the first mirror you find. Perhaps that's why this afternoon on your way back from the office, you couldn't even recognize your own reflection when you glanced at yourself in the shop window of the toy store. So then you arrive home, frightened by what you saw, grab the mirror, and place it on the table. You begin to observe yourself carefully in the center of the mirror, the part that reproduces a new world without any apparent distortion. The mirror is now an immense watching eye, an imposter cyclops, that has taken over your very own self, an aleph that reflects all of your masks. Actually, you're lucky that the mirror is coated in dust because it produces a foggy effect that distorts your face. This is a relief from getting back home after a long, tiring day, without having looked in a mirror for a while. This distortion further creates the necessary distance that allows you to observe yourself without having to look away, and to confront yourself without feeling unbearably insulted when you do look away.

Through the dusty cloud, you're able to pick out an image of yourself that has little or nothing to do with the image of the image that you had made for yourself. But it's hard for you to recognize from that fragile glimpse, the spark of a human who one day journeyed to Paris. As you try to smile, it's hard to see the pristine brightness of a gin and tonic from Jamboree. It's hard to recognize in that furrowed brow, the clear forehead from that one night in Nayarit. It's just hard to recognize yourself, really. You close your eyes, tilt your head slightly, and rub your eyes with your index finger and thumb. In that position, as you concentrate on your inner darkness, you try to compare the image that the mirror gave you with the image from your memory. You see a porch swing with red and brown floral fabric. You see a small toy boat in a park lake during the spring. You see a dog licking your hand. You see a typewriter with a blank page titled, "The Tragic Agony of a Beer." You see an orgy that you've never been in, and a chess match that you've never played. You see an obstacle course. A burned piece of paper. A camping tent in the rain and a war of corn cobs. You notice the soft touch of feet under a table. You see verses written on a napkin. You see an Oscar Wilde quote etched into a desk. You hear moans. You feel the cool wind on your face from that February morning in Menorca. You see an abandoned church. You see a trailer covered with photos from porn magazines. You secretly see the face of an Indian from a movie they never let you watch. You see a hotel room, doubled in the shadows. You hear a door that creaks open. You feel that same drunkenness from that one crazy night in San Juan. You see a car crash. And you open your eyes.

The mirror is still there. Your dull eyes and weak smile are still there. Your cyclops reflection is still there. You draw your index finger across the dusty surface, diagonally, from top to bottom, and right to left. A gleaming scar appears like a long snail trail, scratched down your

face. You draw with your finger again, this time in the opposite direction. A big X now stretches across the mirror. The intersection of the X lies directly over the center of your furrowed brow. It seems like the vantage point of an unforeseeable future with a sawed-off shotgun. Suddenly, the phone rings. You let it ring one, two, three, even four times; halfway through the fifth, it falls silent. You compulsively flatten your hand and wipe off the dust that was left on the silver mirror, and the clarity with which you now appear is unbearable. With a slap, you make the mirror spin; it quickly rolls into itself, gradually slowing down. You make it spin again, as if it were a game of roulette. Again and again. Finally, you let it stop. And the blurry face reflected in mirror is now monstrous, bulging, deformed, and unruly. You turn off the light and ask yourself what the hell you were doing the entire afternoon since you left the office, looking into that shop window of the toy store.



## THE TRAGICOMEDY OF MEFITO AND TENTOREA

Protasis:

The boy who puts his socks on inside out when he plays tennis and studies telecommunications is named Mefito Gonzalez. The girl that knows English, French, Italian, German, and Austrian and believes that eating spaghetti with a spoon is a normal Neapolitan custom is named Ester Tentorea. The two have never spoken to each other, but their passionate glances clearly show an increasing level of boiling romantic tensions. Finally, today they are going to be introduced. They walk towards each other with their respected wingman and flaunting their wonderful lack of originality, they greet each other:

- Hhhullo.

Yes, following the deeply instilled ancestral customs, the first word of this epic love story was... hello. But with such awkward misfortune, they both said it at the same time (which is just objectively ridiculous). In normal circumstances, Mefito would have casually said "Jinx!" (or some witty response of the sort), something that usually resolves these awkward situations. But something unexpected happens: her voice comes out with an unbearable scratchiness, that it rips Mefito's eardrums and provokes such a sharp pain that it causes his eyes to water. But on the other hand, for Tentorea, his "hello" comes out as this nauseating breath that impedes her from saying the normal "Jinx!" and challenges her to save herself from vomiting up her breakfast of *picatostes*. In fact, it's probably better this way, because if it weren't for his bad breath and her harsh voice, the two would have said "Jinx!" in unison (which would have been so absolutely ridiculous with no other possible solution) and their paths would have been quickly separated.

But let's leave it at that, because it's certain that with her voice and his bad breath, they will most likely both end up being mute.

Tentorea went to her house crying. Mefito stayed put, horribly distraught. It could not be that such a beautiful love story would crash and burn because of a nose and hypersensitive ears. There are two problems so far in our story: the first is that neither of Mefito's friends found Tentorea's voice that offensive, and neither of Tentorea's friend found Mefito's breath that repulsive. So on the contrary, it seems that we are dealing with purely personal preferences here. And the second problem is obvious, but could have passed unnoticed: Mefito has discovered the shrillness of Tentorea's voice, and Tentorea is now fully aware of Mefito's foul breath; but neither of them know about their own ailments. So that, in an attempt to show off their kindness and philanthropy, both, in unison, (how could they not) have written each other the following notes:

To my recently discovered Tentorea,

I've been thinking a lot and I've arrived at a difficult but accurate conclusion: I like you more than I like myself, and I value my heart more than I value my hearing. I understand that without you I would be a zero to the nth degree, or even worse, an empty void. Because of this, I'd prefer to live deaf by your side, than blind and never be able to see you again. Don't worry, we all have our defects. Although yours is quite large, to me, it's nothing. I fell in love with you the first moment I saw you, and I will do everything that I can to be always by your side. Two and two make four, and against the evidence one cannot rebel: I love you, and soon we will find a solution for your problems. Until next time.

Infinitely yours: Mefito

My dear and amazing Mefito:

I'm so sorry for having left without saying *au revoir*, but I hope you understand that I hadn't expected such a pituitary shock. However, I've always believed that in order to be human one must have six sense: sight, hearing, smelling, taste, touch, and love. And for me, the last sense is the most important, even more important than, for instance, the third one. Including for someone like you. I would give up all first five sense for an authentic and genuine love, a love in which your gaze alone will reassure and promise me. Because of this potential, we will forget your defect and we'll be happy. And remember: for every great misfortune, there are great remedies. *Dankeshön par tout and a rivederci.*

Always yours, Tentorea

Evidently, the excellent postal service made it so each respective letter arrived at the receiver at same exact time. The surprises on both of their faces were logical and quite foreseeable. This is how they discovered their terrible defects.

Epitasis:

Three days later, full of tears and phone calls (obviously the smell cannot transmit through cable and the bad service slightly distorts Tentorea's voice, which allows Mefito to bravely tolerate a few minutes). The two lovers decide to meet again. They take this moment to engage in a long and passionate stare. And they realize that from now on nothing could ever separate them.

Swept away by a wave of irrevocable destiny, they decide to move in together. They quickly came up with clever solutions for their audio-olfactory problems. He uses in earplugs

and she puts these special pegs on her nose (which thankfully) don't impede her from passionately kissing her dear Mefito). They also enroll in some single subject courses offered by the Ministry of Education and Science, lead by the parents and friends of deaf children. Within a few months, the daily bother of pegs and earplugs were substituted with a coming and going of hand signals, in an amazing and complex silent system of communication. Tentorea found a way to sleep talk at night with her hands and Mefito learned this oriental technique to yawn without opening his mouth. It was the perfect solution.

A few years pass, with the normal marital ups and downs, which stand no chance against this bomb-proof love. Until the moment arrives when they don't remember each other's voices. This one calm autumn afternoon, a natural fear emerges from the oblivion: Tentorea is pregnant.

A terrible anxiety appears, first in her eyes and then in her hands. It is a very delicate situation. The baby will need to learn how to talk and if the parents don't teach him, who will? But, what will happen if the father's breath and the mother's voice were still unbearable? The baby will never stop crying and will never learn how to talk... And what if their issues provoke irreversible problems with the baby's hearing or sense of smell? Mefito and Tentorea look at each other concerned and the same worry pops into their minds (evidently at the same time)...What if they cannot stand the cries of their very own child? Would the baby have a stinky mouth like his father? Or maybe an unbearable voice like his mother? Or... maybe even both?! Wrapped up in silence, Mefito and Tentorea stare at each other and try to read the other's mind. A wave of panic suddenly takes over Tentora: Mefito starts to insistently shake his head, and as if in slow motion his hands, he motions the horrible message: youuuu shoulddd abbortt, Tenntooreaa, yooou shoulddd gett an aborrrioon...

Catastasis:

Tentorea, with silenced hands and a telling look, takes a couple steps back. Mefito walks toward her in a vain effort to hug her and sees the poisonous resentment that is already growing in her eyes. He tries to convince her, persuade her, make her understand that it would be a mistake to have a child; but Tentorea, bewildered, was only able to point at the front door and yell at him with her hands, saying that she never wants to see him again. Mefito, despondent, walks towards the door with his head down, when he sadly puts his shaky hand on the doorknob, he hears a window open, a body climb, and a suicidal scream. And then he realizes: her scream was not unbearable. He runs down the stairs and out to the street to find her on the ground surrounded by a pool of blood. He holds her body in his arms and cries. Tentorea has just enough time to hear him say “I love you” and that’s when she realizes that his breath no longer smells.

## THE RUBIK'S CUBE

## 1. Socrates

They say that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. They also say that a straight line is the succession of points. Here, we will say that life is a straight line of moments, of which there is always someone who opens the door to posterity. Only, one must figure out how to find this door, how to make coincidence of an adequate place and an opportune moment. Furthermore, if we fashion that idea into an inspirational phrase, we would probably break through onto the path to glory (and the great phrase would then convert into the shortest distance necessary to arrive at this fame). But if we miss that one and only shot, we will surely condemn ourselves into everlasting obscurity. This point of inflection between fame and obscurity is what Axel Browling designates, quite fittingly, as the “delicacy of the biography”[1].

But Socrates had not read Browling when that one hungover morning in the year 435 BC he woke up with a dry mouth. If he had read it, perhaps he would have been more cautious. Although, they do say that Socrates, along with being ugly, was also quite bold. On the headboard above his bed he had carved one of the Greek aphorisms from the Oracle at Delphi: “γνώθι σεαυτόν”[2]. He spent weeks reflecting on this curious principal and last night, surrounded by bottles of wine and other drunken companions, he had some sort of revelation. (They also say that Socrates could drink more than anyone without losing an atom of consciousness.) So in that precise moment when the wine left the security of his mouth to begin the internal journey through the mysterious abyss of his stomach, a genius phrase popped into his head. A phrase that was brilliantly destined, without doubt, to cause a fuss among his circle of friends, and a few headaches from the present exegesis, and surely for any future biographers.

Before the wine had reached his stomach, Socrates opened his mouth, but noticing the drunken disorder of the surrounding situation, he closed it. “It is not the time to waste such a genius phrase.” He should have thought, “I will find the right place and time”.

So without having read Browling, Socrates awoke calmly with his dry mouth. He prepared his chamomile tea, cleared his throat gargling, and addressed smugly to the public assembly. Last night he had lost his voice in anticipation of today, when he was planning to reveal his genius phrase. The plaza was overflowing with people and expectations. Socrates stepped on the platform, getting into place. He cleared his throat. And, waiting eagerly for his applause, he said “Je pense, donc je suis”[3].

## 2. Descartes

They say that when an obstacle appears, the shortest distance between two points is a curved line. They also say that there are two types of artists: those who ask questions and those who give answers. Before the obstacle, those who ask questions stop and open inquiry; those who give answers prefer the risk of an unknown curve. The problem with the artists that give answers is that they often die misunderstood, and sometimes they answer questions that have yet to be asked. The answer the artist finds then is obliged to wait in the bottom of a drawer until Humanity is ready to formulate the adequate question. Axel Browling scientifically defines this as the “chronotopic gap of anticipation”[4].

But Descartes had not yet read Browling when that one cold night in 1637 someone knocked on his door. He was just about to tidy up the last page of his new philosophical treaty. They say that what he had written was actually from four years beforehand. But, shortly after he

had signed the contract with his bookseller, he had received the disastrous news of one of the most ridiculous abominations of all of history: Galileo Galilei would be burned at stake if he didn't abandon his hard work in proving Earth's orbits. "E pur si muove,"[5] they say that he added *sotto voce* in Italian, after becoming one of the greatest academic rebels of all time. But Descartes was not really one for those metaphysical tantrums, so he waited a while, conscious of the flaming implications that the publication of his work could bring. So, Descartes dedicated himself during those four years to cultivating tulips and translating his *opera magna*, which was originally written in Latin, into French (taking advantage of each step, in order to allow some inadequate orthodox comments to brew in the inkpot). What he did not totally forget about, was to reserve the best for last: the last sentence of the treaty was not only going to "revolutionize the history of western philosophy," (in the very own words of Descartes) but was also in itself, a compendium and key for the whole work. Finally, after the end of those four years, urged from the pressure of his friends, from the longing of his own ego, and most of all, from the ultimatum given to him by the bookseller, he decided to publish the treaty. And yes, it was without a signature and in French [6].

As it was that one cold night in 1637 while Descartes (without having read Browling) neatly transcribed the last couple of paragraphs in his ambitious work that someone knocked on his door. It was his bookseller. "Take a seat. I was just finishing it up," Descartes said to him, hopeful of finally converting all of his gray chicken scratch into tidy printer's ink. Descartes sat down. He finished the treaty. He stood up. And with a smile upon his lips, he handed over the document, without realizing that the last thing he had written said something along the lines of: "e = mc <sup>2</sup>".



### 3. Einstein

They say that if we would fold a cigar paper forty nine times at once, the resulting thickness would be the distance that exists between the Earth and the Moon. With nine folds more, we would reach the Sun. And twenty folds later, we would be in Alpha Centauri. Surely, with more folds, we would eventually arrive at God. There, he would surprise us by playing with the universe, like one that entertains himself by playing with a Rubik's Cube. Actually, Axel Browling has used the metaphor of the Rubik's Cube to explain the theory, "Browling's Conjecture," which states that time and space are two concentric spheres that, in extraordinary situations, can get knocked out of place. It's the same that he himself has defined, quite apocalyptically, as the "Crack of Rubik"[7].

But Browling's theories did not help Einstein at all that one calm afternoon in 1905 when he grabbed a piece of chalk in front of the attentive gaze of a hundred questioning eyes. In this occasion, we will spare the details of the event and cut to the chase, the end of the story, in which every reader (being mindful of modern prose) should have already been able to guess. We will say that Einstein had poised himself in that precise instant to write a mathematical formula on the board that would forever refute the majority of physical theories maintained up till then. Einstein will grab the chalk and reach out his hand. And inevitably, he will write: "I only know that I know nothing" [8].

\* \* \*

## Epilogue

Someone has said that to be a genius is to choose wisely and guess correctly. Socrates, Descartes, and Einstein all had the opportunity for fame and success, they were chosen as geniuses, but failed trying. Whether “Browning’s Conjecture” and the “Crack of Rubik” have relation with this said failure, is something that we will leave up to the interpretation of the reader. But in any case, here we have shed light on the frustrating existence of these three people who could have been famous but simply did not make it. Perhaps rescuing them now from obscurity is a just a tribute to their determination and dedication. Socrates was condemned to drink poison hemlock, accused of corruption of minors (seriously, the weird and sensual resonance of French did not help in his defense). Descartes was burned at the stake because his inexplicable formula  $e = mc^2$  was interpreted by some as “enfer = moi et le double Christ” (of course, this double Christ being none other than the Antichrist); or as “enfer = magie carrément cartésienne”. And finally, Einstein was dubbed crazy and shut in an insane asylum. To all of them, *in memoriam*, our most profound respect and admiration.

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[1] Axel Browling, *The sky: an epistemology of the fame*, Ed. Starworks, New York, 1995, pp. 44-45.

[2] Meaning, “Know thyself”.

[3] Meaning, “I think, therefore I am.”

[4] Axel Browling, pp. 174-179.

[5] Meaning, “And yet it moves”.

[6] It is necessary for the reader to keep in mind that in those times, it was very unusual to publish a philosophical or scientific text in French.

[7] Axel Browling, pp.201-218.

[8] In ancient Greek, for more perplexity: ἐν οἶδα ὅτι οὐδὲν οἶδα.

## IT WAS AROUND 3:20

Just as she places her foot on the crosswalk, the pedestrian light turns red. Bummed that she just missed it, the girl with short hair steps back to the sidewalk, while the driver of a gray car passes first dead center with his foot on the gas, slowing releasing the clutch and pulling up with a slight roar. As if it were an echo of the motor, the stomach of the girl responds with a rumble, reminding her that she hasn't eaten in over eight hours. For a moment, she imagines arriving home and having food already prepared for her. She fantasizes about the idea of a warm, cozy home, with a steaming plate of lentils waiting on the table, someone approaches her from behind and kisses her neck... While outside, the rain comes down and the first couple of drops tap against the windows, slowly form fine lines of water that trickle down erratically. The driver of the gray car keeps going. As it passes by, the two kids in the backseat look out of the glass window that was fogged from the vapor of their breaths. The one in the window seat was probably around ten, blonde hair and rowdy; he had just written his name on the window and his index finger still lingered on the glass. Because of the difficult angle, the girl surprises herself when she is actually able to read the name that he wrote. But then she quickly understands why she could read it: his name is Otto. The smaller boy, probably his brother, looks to be about seven, with darker hair in a streaky combover off to one side. When they pass by, he gets closer to the window and presses his nose up to the glass. He flaps his left hand by way of greeting and stars directly into the eyes of the girl. Her eyes follow the car until she loses sight at the second crosswalk. She remembers the times when her mother drove her and her brother around in a beige, convertible station wagon, with the fabric roof. It had a small crack where the water would drip in on rainy days.

On the opposite sidewalk, a young girl with a cello on her back stops when she saw the green light flicker. She observes how, on the other side of the street, the girl with short hair put one foot on the sidewalk and with a gesture of disappointment, stepped back up to the curb. The young girl smiles at her grimace of defeat, because it reminded her of the times that she would get angry with her mom. She always used to hold her back by the hand and tell her not to cross the street until the pedestrian stoplight turned from red to green and then green again, in order to reassure that the flicker wouldn't sneak up on her in the middle of the street. She hears a roar from the motor of the gray car, sees how it starts up slowly and how it passes the pedestrian crosswalk. The driver, upon passing, blatantly looks at her without even trying to hide it, turning his neck ever so boldly. She puts up with the glare, but not without feeling uncomfortable. She recognizes something about his features, wavy-ish hair, a well-shaped moustache, rough lips, and a strong jaw... the characteristics of an old high school teacher. This image sparks an old memory of her dreamy teacher who used to ramble on about literature, it makes her sigh. Then her mind wanders to those days when she would plan the most ridiculous strategies to run into him, in order to meet him in hallways, parking lots, or sometimes when he left the teachers' lounge. She remembers the numerous emphatic love letters (some of which were quite passionate) that she started writing but never dared to send him. Then she tries to imagine for a second what would have happened if she had sent those letters. She imagines herself in the gray car that just passed, with a hand of her husband resting gently on her thigh (not the man with blonde wavy hair and hairy lips of course, but *hers*, the teacher with gray hair and small round glasses, the one that loved Lorca and the Valle-Inclán with the same passion that her father spoke of Quini or Maradona). Out of the corner of her eye she watches the two cute kids in the back seat who cheer

up the pedestrians stopped at the sidewalk, like that girl with short hair who is now staring back at them from the sidewalk, until she loses sight.

With the memory of the beige station wagon, the girl with the short hair watches the gray car drive away. With a mechanical gesture, she pushes up the left sleeve of her green turtleneck and glances at her watch. A little old hunchback lady with a cane and shiny white hair tied up in a bun was by her side, a little too close for comfort in fact, even though the girl didn't seem to mind. Her mind must be in another place. The sky was overcast and thunder sounded off in the distance, like a lazy grumble from an old motor. She lifts her eyes and observes with a furrowed brow the dark clouds that were coming in from the sea in an ominous multitude. No doubt, it wouldn't take long for the first couple of raindrops to fall. A flock of birds (could they be swallows?) fly through the air, soaring from high to low, brushing against the tops of the banana trees. *I wish I could be a bird* she mutters to herself; to not know the time (and not even care), to never dream of prepared food or wish for fleeting kisses, and of course, to not have to wait to cross the street. The little old lady lifts her eyes and looks at her, she has a surprised look through the thick lenses of her circular glasses. The girl looks back and gives a hint of a sad smile. They continue observing each other for a minute, mutually reflecting on themselves in the mirror of time; the younger one peeking into the past, and the older glimpsing into the future. The young girl tries to imagine what the old lady was thinking. Could she be remembering her years of youth during times of the war, when she waited impatiently for the arrival of a boyfriend or husband under a sky littered with bombs going off like thunder? Or, maybe, could she be thinking about her daughter who died during childbirth while in exile in Mexico? Although, it could also be that she is thinking of her own granddaughter, who she hasn't spoken with since

she surprised her rummaging through the drawers of her bedside table... The girl tries to imagine herself a half-century later, but she couldn't. She only sees an empty rocking chair next to a fireplace with hot coals.

On the opposite side of the street, the girl with the cello, now freed from her adolescent memories, zips up her jacket and becomes distracted by the short-haired girl. She sees how she was in shock for a moment after the gray car passed, and how she checked the time on her watch. She sees her inching closer and stopping by the side of the little old lady with the white bun, who had fallen behind a little while following her granddaughter. She sees the girl with short hair look at the sky when she hears the thunder and she makes the same funny gesture of disappointment again, that one that she made right before the traffic light turned red. It looks like she is muttering something between her teeth, with a lost look on her face. The little old lady also seems to hear something, because she lifts her eyes towards her and scrutinizes closely, while the girl with short hair looks back. Judging by the expression on their faces, they don't know each other at all. She finds this awkward silence funny, this quiet challenge between generations, this silent dialogue under the threatening sky. Then, a gas truck passes ahead, in the opposite direction of the gray car, which blocks her vision of the two women for a fraction of a second. The driver of the truck honks the horn and the boy on her side of the truck sticks his head out the window and whistles at her. The cello girl responds with an obscene hand gesture, almost instinctively with resigned reluctance, she's used to it by now. When the truck no longer obstructs her vision, she sees that the short-haired girl and the old lady with white hair have stopped staring at each other. And now it is *her* whom they are staring at.

The honk from the truck startles them all out of their deep thoughts. The rocking chair, fireplace, and coals disappear from the mind of the short-haired girl, who turns abruptly, startled by the beep. She looks over exactly when the young cello girl makes an obscene gesture at the guys in the truck. She watches her, with only a few feet of separation between them, and decides that she seems vaguely familiar, but she can't think of where she knows her from. She thinks maybe they had crossed paths in another occasion, or ran into each other at a bar, strolling through the city, or perhaps walking this very same intersection. When the young girl finishes responding to the obnoxious truck drivers, she looks forward and their gazes cross. No, she definitely doesn't know who she is, there's a chance that they've never even seen each other. After a moment of uncertainty, they smile to each other in an unspoken agreement. The little old lady mutters a couple of words to herself under her breath and stamps the end of her cane nervously on the pavement. Maybe she had also seen the obscene gesture from the cello girl, or maybe she's just losing her patience with this long green light. A motorcycle zooms by, and then the green traffic light changes to yellow. Not too far from there, the sound of screeching motorcycle brakes fill the air and the girl with the short hair swears at the drivers, remembering an accident that she had with her cousin a couple of years ago. Sometimes her clavicle still hurts. Once the red light came on for the cars, after a brief pause for security purposes, the green pedestrian light finally comes on. The girl with short hair offers her arm to the old lady, who refuses it with dignity, or perhaps just bad temper. When she takes her first step onto the crosswalk, the first drops of rain fall.

## AND THEN THERE ARE DENTISTS

On one side there are the doctors and physicians, surgeons, neurologists, pediatricians and anesthetists, just like the interns, residents, assistants or graduates, the gynecologists, obstetricians, urologists, and otolaryngologists, the oculists and ophthalmologists, cardiologists, rheumatologists and epidemiologists, along with the the homeopaths, osteopaths, kinesiologists and veterinarians, and then of course the podiatrists, chiropractors and physical therapists, the curers, quacks, the frauds and sorcerers. And then, there are dentists.

The dentist, also known as an odontologist and stomatologist (which can be misleading) is often an irreproachable guy. He is scrupulously shaved, with recently cut hair, expensive perfume, the ironed white coat (that is even ironed at the pockets), a wedding ring (usually gold) on his ring finger, without even the tiniest bit of hair sticking out of his nose or ears. And, of course, he has perfect teeth, they were done right here in the office (whether natural or fake, either way, they can do it all). Normally, on the way to your consultation (after the appointment had been arranged three weeks in advance because the doctor was “really busy right now”) you realize that you didn’t even brush your teeth before leaving the house. So you have to run to the pharmacy, buy a toothbrush and toothpaste, head to the nearest café, grab a coffee in a hurry (being careful enough to not stain your tie), and go to the bathroom to brush your teeth. Because of the general rule of thumb, even though experience tells you otherwise, you rush yourself in order to show up a couple minutes before your scheduled appointment time. Like always, the assistant lets you in. She’s pretty good looking, with a ton of makeup, short, slicked-back hair, dressed strictly in a white coat, white pants and crocs, and has a charming smile. Then she leads you to the waiting room, where there are usually already three or four people half-heartedly



leafing through magazines. Luckily, the leather seats are actually comfortable and the light that filters through the windows is kind of nice, although there is a certain tension in the atmosphere. The people are strangely quiet, almost mystically so, but this silence was interrupted by a deafening and terrifying buzz that happens every now and then, coming from the first room. The patients slowly start walking out one-by-one, followed by the assistant who has come to look for them without losing her cheerful smile. The patients try to reciprocate her smile, but can only muster to respond with a tense smirk of apprehension, as if they were condemned prisoners on the way to the scaffold. Normally, the waiting room keeps filling up with more quiet patients, but at times it can be pretty empty, the only traffic is those few people that head towards the exit. However, this time has been the worst yet, because at the end of the hour you find yourself absolutely alone, curled up in a ball in your seat (which after time has turned out to be not as comfortable as you had originally thought) hiding yourself behind a magazine that you're not even reading. You secretly hope that the assistant won't see you and that you could sneak out and free yourself from the claws of the executioner. But that hope fades away when you hear the door open, screeching like a rusty garrote, and from behind your magazine shield, you hear a sweet voice say your name. Trembling, you peek over your paper barricade and see that diabolic smile framed between two white fangs that look like parentheses and you remember the phrase that your mom used to say when she came to the dentist with you, "There are only two types of dental assistants, the bad ones, and the ones that pretend to be good, but are even worse." With as much dignity as possible, you leave the magazine at the seat and walk through the threshold directed by the white gatekeeper. After closing the door behind your back, she opens another larger door into a dark, sinister room.

There he is. With his white coat. Recently shaved. With the stripe down one side. Smiling. A shiver runs down your spine, from top to bottom, and the hairs on the back of your neck stand up straight. He shakes your hand, his feels like warm wax, with clean, pink fingernails, white slivers arching like streams of milk; yours, on the contrary, were sweaty and shaky, like slippery fish, invertebrate and lifeless, clumsy, flabby, and indecisive. The dentist enters the handshake with affirmation and grace, and during this whole interaction he maintains that unwavering smile of a professional who has seen worse. With the gesture of a novice bullfighter, he motions for you to take a seat. It is a curved type of stretcher, like the tilde of a giant ñ, or the spine of a hunchback demon with scoliosis. The assistant drapes a bib over you and when she ties it around your neck, you discover the deep abyss of the unholy underworld of woman. But already, Evil approaches you with his torture instruments, ready to dig out your molar. While he asks you to open wide, the assistant switches on the light above your head (one of those articulated lamps that looks more like a mechanical giraffe) and he takes advantage of that brief moment of distraction. Your pupils dilate and your eyes become fuzzy and out of focus. The maleficent dentist gives you anesthesia, that shot in your mouth was like the size of a bazooka. It pinches you delicately on the gums and catches you off guard. Your first instinct is to close your mouth, give that audacious dentist a good chomp on the hand. But his movements are astonishingly quick, seen and not seen, when you clamp your jaw down you only bite air and your teeth hit against each other. The needle and hand have disappeared and the anesthesia has already been injected. You notice a strange taste in your mouth, like sulphur. You feel your fingers tense when the assistant smoothly takes your hand and smiles with her white parenthesis fangs, insinuating that everything is fine, that nothing is happening. I'm here, loosen up, relax,

let go of any other idea... Little by little, you start to calm down. But you feel that you are distancing from yourself, almost as if instead of sitting in that dark tilde chair that *you* were the mechanical giraffe that looked down with twinkling eyes. Then you see that Astaroth the Dentist approaches you with pliers in his hands and, what a gloomy nightmare, he balances over you and straddles you at the knees.

For a moment you think you're going to faint. You lose any notion of time and space. You close your eyes, see absolutely nothing, but can sense that the assistant is standing behind you. She grabs you with one hand on your lower jaw and squeezes it without the least consideration for your chest, while the other hand fixes your forehead onto the headboard of the seat. You notice that Lucifer the Dentist has perfume, and each time you inhale he gets closer to you and the smell is more intense. You can feel how he moves the pliers around your numb mouth and he begins to dig viciously inside of you. After a little while, you hear him snort impatiently, and you notice that his hand has entered your mouth and is feeling around each and every corner. When you open your eyes you see that he actually has half of his entire arm inside of you. So now you couldn't even close your mouth even if you wanted to. The assistant lets go of your forehead and jaw and helps the diabolical dentist take off his shoes. In the blink of an eye, he has already dived into your mouth. His other arm, his head, torso, and his leg until the knees, are all fully submerged. Now the only thing that you see are two little feet with black socks kicking in the air while he digs out your rotten molar. The assistant observes the scene with a beaming smile, she brings her hands together at chest height and tilts her head ever so tenderly. Then you think that maybe one big bite could end it all, could get rid of the evil Asmodeus and send him back to the darkness, where he never should have escaped. But your

throat is too dry, which makes it impossible to swallow. The assistant guesses your every move, and jolts into action, grabbing hold of the dentist's feet. Finally, you feel a painless crack inside of you, like the sensation of a sword being pulled out of your stomach by a fearsome opponent, or maybe like the sensation of a carrot being yanked out of the ground by a starving child. You think you hear someone scream "eureka!" from your insides and now you finally understand how Charon came back to world of life. You feel like you're going to faint again, so you close your eyes. Everything turns silent around you. The only thing that could be heard was the tinkling bits of tartaric acid being deposited around a metallic surface. You hear two voices mumble and a door open and close. A hand rests softly on your shoulder. You open your eyes. The assistant is there with her angelic smile, offering you a cup of water and napkin so you can gargle. After, she takes off your bib and gives you an assortment of cotton balls to wedge in the gaping hole of the extracted molar. You grit your teeth satisfyingly until you get home or at least out of the office. You try to say thanks and smile, but the only thing that came out was an incomprehensible growl and a faint-hearted grin. You get up, dizzy and dazed, and leave the room following the assistant. The dentist has disappeared.

Of course, in order to be able to leave that staged underworld of consultation, first you need to pay Charon's toll. The emptiness left by your molar now matches the emptiness of your sad wallet. The assistant accompanies you to the door, still smiling. You take the elevator down even though you're only on the second floor. You push the button for the first floor and can't resist the temptation to look at yourself in the mirror. You open your mouth and the first thing that you see is a cotton ball soaked in globs of blood. And then once more, without really knowing why, you open your mouth and discover, astonished, that you have a bifurcated tongue.

## ACCIDENT

*To my muse Eirene, who  
made me accomplice of a murder.*

**Silverio Molina, age 72, House of Boulevard, Calle Peña Gorbea, Madrid.**

It was three in the afternoon, or maybe later, closer to four, I don't know. It could have been a Saturday because there wasn't much traffic and the streets were half-empty... but either way, give me a break, when you're retired every day seems like a Saturday. What I am sure about is that it had rained that day, and maybe this was one of the causes of the accident, but who knows. I was walking with my granddaughter, Clara, in hand, gripped tightly so she couldn't escape (at least so she couldn't run off, she's a bundle of energy that one). So we started crossing the street at the crosswalk when that motorcycle sped past the red light. Fortunately, I always look both ways when I cross, even if it's a one way street or when the pedestrian light is green. And especially when I go out with my granddaughter because you know there are always those really crazy drivers out there who could run you over at any second. My son usually says that statistically it's in the crosswalks where there are the most casualties because people have too much faith in others. He could be right, I wouldn't disagree, but I always like to contradict him. So I tell him that such a thing is normal, since 90% of people actually use the crosswalk (that percentage I just made up, of course, although I told him that I had read it in somewhere in the newspaper). It's like saying that hospitals are the most dangerous places because statistically it's where the most people die, do you know what I mean? So anyway, I saw how the motorcycle was rushing towards us and I jumped back, pulling Clara with me. She was so scared that she dropped that little ragdoll that she was carried around. This I can remember perfectly because the

motorcycle ran right over the doll and for a moment I had the absurd impression that it was my granddaughter who had just been run over, and that I was holding the doll instead. Isn't that wild? Luckily, Clara's scream jolted me back into reality, and I began to insult the driver of the motorcycle (and the person sitting behind him who at the moment I thought was a guy, as if it had been his fault) and threatening them with my umbrella (yes, I remember perfectly, it had definitely been raining that morning). The driver turned to listen to my insults (or maybe he had already turned at that point, I don't know), but he never made any sort of gesture or response. I don't remember what I screamed at him, I'm sure it was some pretty foul language because I remember being embarrassed to look at my granddaughter. Although, I don't think that she even heard anyway, she looked at me with tears in her eyes because her ragdoll had been flattened like a pancake on the crosswalk. But she didn't try to go grab the doll, which is weird, right? It was then that I heard the brakes, or maybe there were two, the screech of the motorcycle and then the oil truck. I lifted my head and saw the truck run over the motorcycle and the drivers both went flying out into the air. You know, I had this weird sensation that it took a while for them to fall down to the ground, almost like it was in slow motion. When their bodies finally bounced onto the asphalt it seemed like it had happened in silence, almost as if they didn't want to bother the neighbors.

Someone that walked the crosswalk in the opposite direction grabbed the doll, handed it to Clara, and pointed at the accident. The driver and passenger came out of the oil truck, I remember the gleam from their orange suits, it seemed like an obvious omen of bad luck. While one of the guys took out his phone to call an ambulance (I assumed) the other directed traffic, holding his hands above his head. The motorcycle driver was still stretched out on the ground,

not moving, but his partner with a huge backpack stood up slowly and took off the helmet. It was then that I realized the partner was a girl. The few cars that were driving by started to stop and stare (I mean some of them didn't have a choice, because the motorcycle and the driver were in the middle of the highway, cutting off the flow of traffic). A police officer finally showed up. The pedestrian light turned green again, so I threw Clara over my shoulder to keep her from seeing the accident and we crossed the street quickly, looking both ways, of course. When we got to the sidewalk on the other side of the road, we heard the ambulance arrive. I held Clara in my arms and gave her a kiss on the cheek. She wrapped her arms around my neck and then I realized that she was no longer holding her doll, but I didn't want to say anything. She looked up at me and said, I remember it perfectly: "You know, Grandpa, I think that I am an adult now". And she kissed me on the forehead.

The next day I checked for news about the accident in the events section of the paper, you know, that free one that they now give out on street corners, but I couldn't find anything.

**Venancio Jaramillo, age 31, eating at the restaurant "Las Piñas," on the corner of Monte Igueldo and Eduardo Sanz, Madrid.**

Yeah, Moha and I have eaten here before, when we're in the neighborhood around lunch time we always pass by, you know, the food is good and cheap. Nowadays it's hard to find a proper lunch special for seven euro, the way it should be! I'm telling you, I've eaten almost everywhere in Madrid. I'm pretty sure that day that I drank what I usually do, a couple of beers to settle my stomach and coffee with rum after dessert, so I don't think that I would have even shown up positive on a breathalyzer. Either way, the cops didn't even ask. Plus, the guy on the

motorcycle was really the one to blame, that fucker, he jumped the traffic light. I remember right before the accident Moha and I had been watching this hot chick from the car, she was walking down Primo de Rivera. She had this greenish, blue scarf around her neck and dark skin. I don't know why I remember this so well, probably because she reminded me of my mom when she was a teenager, or maybe because of the whole accident, that day was pretty well ingrained in my mind. Moha said that she looked liked a famous actress from his country and dared me, "Honk at her, honk at her, you fuckerrr!" (like that with a bunch of r's, the way he always says it), so I tried to stop staring at her. Who knows, maybe if I had honked at her, at least the motorcycle driver would have realized that we were coming. Then Moha stuck half his body out the window, that motherfucker, and whistled loudly, which sounded more like a wolf howl than a whistle. The girl flipped us off, as if wanting to say *fuck off you assholes*. So Moha and I started laughing and we kept watching her through the rearview mirror until she was out of view. But then when I turned forward to look through the front windshield, it was already too late: I ran into the motorcycle and the guy and girl flew off. I mean, in my defense, the guy didn't even brake or try to dodge me. I don't know, maybe he fell asleep and jumped the red light or was talking to his girl and didn't see me driving, what do I know. But I'm positive that I did brake, I remember perfectly... but I guess that didn't matter anyway.

So then we got down from the truck. While Moha went to help the bikers, I checked the back of the truck to make sure none of the gas tanks fell out, then I called 9-1-1. Shit, man, that biker dude was thrown down on the ground, mouth open, arms wide open as if on a cross, like Jesus Christ. However, the girl with him got up and although Moha tried to stop her, she took off her helmet. Actually, I think that the backpack might have saved her life, think about it, that



backpack was basically the size of a suitcase. She must have fallen on her back and the backpack braced her fall. While I talked with the ambulance operator, I stared at the girl, she was quite pretty. You see, even in those most tragic moments one cannot stop thinking about these kind of things, it's just how humans are. Then loads of people started showing up, some curious and others trying to help. Later, a couple of cops arrived and told me to get my truck out of the highway so we wouldn't cause another accident. While I moved the truck, I heard the ambulance siren. Moha and one of the cops (I think it was a lady) grabbed the motorcycle from the middle of the road and moved it to the sidewalk. The motorcycle girl, upon noticing that the guy she was riding with wasn't moving, started to scream and cry. But the weirdest thing about it was that she began to curse at him, I guess because of all of the nerves and emotions. I don't know, what a crazy experience, man. It's like if a kid were breastfeeding and the mom slaps him, you just can't explain it. I think that the chick was so out of it that she would have started punching the poor guy if the ambulance hadn't started taking care of her, I swear. Then, they put the guy in the ambulance and rushed him off in a hurry, sirens on. I never saw the girl again, so I guess she was also taken away in the ambulance. After, the guards asked me and Moha a bunch of questions and investigated the scene, they wrote down information, and told us that they'd call if they needed anything else. Only then did I realize the possible damage of the truck, so I went to go see if it was okay. The front bumper was dented and the license plate had been unhitched on one side and was hanging off, almost touching the ground. Fuck, I thought, what's Guti going to say (Guti is the guy in charge, basically the boss of the business, the head honcho). I asked Moha to drive for a little and we went back to work. What a bummer, man. That really sucked. Now every time I pass by that spot I always get the chills.

**Clara Molina, age 10, the garden of her grandparent's house, Colonia Mirasierra, Madrid.**

I was angry at Berta for not having given me better advice with all of that Marcos stuff. No way man, Berta is not a friend, Berta is my ragdoll that my grandpa gave me last christmas. Or I guess, she *was* my ragdoll, because she got run over by a motorcycle and died. Yes, that motorcycle from the accident, duh. And Marcos is, well, Marcos is my... or he *was* a friend. Yeah, that's it, a friend from class... but a special friend. You know what I'm saying? I liked him and he liked me, but don't go saying anything to my parents, okay? I think that when we get older he'll become a writer, because he writes really good essays. The teacher says they're no good because he always forgets to put periods and he writes bad words, but I think that he does that on purpose. It's a matter of style, as he says, and the truth is that he does have good "style". Also he writes, or he wrote, some pretty cute love notes, later I can show you if you want, and there he does put periods and doesn't use curse words, it's just a different style. Well, anyway the thing is that, ever since my grandpa gave Berta to me she was my best friend, I told her everything and she listened attentively, with those big blue eyes that she has, or, that she *had*, and that smile was kind of smug and nerdy, you know, as if she was trying to suck up to me all of the time. But I trusted her and I told her everything. We talked about my classes, my sports practices, my fights with friends, the discussions between my parents, and above all, my relationship with Marcos. No, I mean it's not like she could respond, she is only a doll, but I always imagined her answers and sometimes I wrote about it in my diary: "Today Berta told me this and recommended me to do that," that kind of thing. Of course, Berta's answers were always good. She always advised me to do what she would do, she never stopped me from doing anything, and if she wanted to play she would say, "Clara, I think you've studied enough today

and you should go out to play in the garden” and things like that. But that day, the day of the accident, while I was in my grandpa’s house, she started to talk all deep and emotional, something that she had never done before. She told me that Marcos wasn’t good for me, that he wasn’t a good guy, that the teacher always punished him but that he would end up being a nobody. She told me that I was not going to be happy by his side. She said that he would surely become a drunk and start fighting with me, and that he was going to abandon me, like his dad did to his mom. I said no way, that she was wrong, and that she was just jealous of Marcos. But she said no that’s not it, and that if I didn’t leave him soon, something bad was going to happen. I got angry with her and during dinner I yelled at her (I tossed her in the washing machine, which I know she really hates). After eating I said goodbye to Grandma, that poor lady doesn’t even recognize me sometimes. She calls me Claudia or Jennifer, you try to figure out why, I have no idea. But one day she called me Berta, which I didn’t like so much because she confused me with my doll, and even worse, that was the same day that I was mad at Berta! So I took her out of the washing machine and Grandpa and I went to take the subway to come here... Yes, yeah, that’s when the accident happened. I carried Berta around by her hair, thinking of throwing her under the wheels of a car if she kept bringing up Marcos. So, when I saw that motorcycle rushing towards us, I left go of her without thinking twice, taking advantage of the moment when my grandpa yanked me out of the street. The motorcycle passed right on top of Berta, she flipped over a couple of times, and then laid face up, with one eye hanging off, hair scrambled and her fluffy insides falling out of her side. Then the motorcycle crashed into a car, but at that point I could only think about Berta and what I was going to say to Marcos when I see him. I think I cried a little, because it always sucks when you lose a friend. But deep down, it made me happy

to have gained my independence back, recently Berta had been consuming too much of me. A woman that crossed the street grabbed Berta and gave her back to me. Later, when my grandpa was distracted, he kept looking at the accident (yeah he can be a bit morbid sometimes), I used that moment to throw Berta in in the trash at the crosswalk. When we crossed the street my grandpa grabbed me in his arms and gave me one of his usual slobbery kisses. I wiped off my forehead with the back of my hand and told him, “You know, Grandpa, I think that I just became a woman”. He made a strange face, I mean he probably thought that I had like gotten my period or something serious. Later, we continued walking to the station. And that was it. The next day I was writing a letter to Marcos, explaining everything that happened: how Berta was being bad, how I had to get rid of her, that now nothing could separate us, you know, all of those other things people say when they are in love. The day after that I went to school really happy, hoping to give Marcos the letter, but he didn’t come to class that day, I think that he had gotten sick. After days passed and our relationship grew old. I started to like another boy and he I think that he started to like another girl, well, stuff happens. And now we barely talk, but I will always have good memories of him. The only thing that leaves a bad taste in my mouth is the thought that Berta was right, that Marcos wasn’t the man for me, and that I was probably too harsh on her. But, you know, stuff happens, life goes on.

**José Antonio Ramírez, age 45, Municipal Police Commissary, Calle Puerto Cardoso, Madrid.**

No, absolutely not, the official statement of the accident says very clearly: Saturday, the 25th of November. There’s nothing about a Sunday, I don’t know who would have given you

that information. I'm lucky that I don't have to go to work on Sundays, and that day I was on the clock, so there is no doubt that it happened on Saturday. I work in the Accident Investigation Unit and I was on duty with Bernarda, or should I say, with Agent María José San Bernardo. We were finishing our rounds and heading back to the police station down Calle Buenos Aires, when we received a call from the station informing us of an accident. Within a minute or two we arrived at the scene of the event. A Yamaha 750 had crossed the middle of a highway and cut the path of northbound traffic, specifically a Nissan truck loaded with gas tanks that had been stopped in the opposite lane. A few feet from the motorcycle a young man was lying face up and a little further away, on her knees, a young girl with a backpack and a helmet in hand watched the looked at the scene with wide eyes. While Agent San Bernardo took photos, recording the scene, I went over to the guy who seemed to be the driver of the truck and asked him politely to take his truck out of the highway immediately. The other, a Pakistani guy, reminded me of that Simpsons character, man, what was his name? Oh well, it doesn't matter, so the Pakistani helped Agent María José move the motorcycle out of the road. In the midst of all of this, the ambulance arrived, or maybe it was already there when we had arrived, it was weird, I don't really remember and the statement doesn't clarify. Normally I take notes because Bernarda, or Agent San Bernardo, is more careless and usually doesn't write anything down. Anyway, when the ambulance got there, the first thing they did was attend to the guy who was sprawled out on the ground, and then they had to take care of the girl, because she had started to scream and curse at the guy on the ground, which is typical of these kind of accidents. While I took a declaration from the Pakistani and the driver of the truck, María José wrote down the official report and sketched a map of the accident. The ambulance took the guy, a bunch of curious bystanders

dispersed, the men from the gas truck kept working, and Bernarda, or should I say, nevermind, you get it, Bernarda and I returned to the station. In ten minutes everything went back to normal. It's hard to believe that life inevitably follows it's own course, without even stopping to grab a coffee, my dad always said.

That night I took my son to the movies, like every Saturday, to see another cartoon movie, one of those surprisingly good Disney movies that supposedly parents like as much as kids. I remember because when we were in line to buy the tickets, someone's phone rang in front of me. From what I understood, the call was from Bilbao or San Sebastián, I don't remember exactly, but it was from somewhere in the Basque Country. From the facial expressions that followed the phone call, you could tell that it wasn't good news. When he hung up, he said to his friend: "My cousin was in a motorcycle accident". They said a few brief words to each other and then abandoned the line. So then I started thinking of the accident, it wasn't until I heard a voice from the box-office that I was brought back to reality. Once inside, I bought my kid some popcorn and we stretched out in the theater seats. Not soon after I fell asleep, which is normal for me, and I had a dream about the accident, which is definitely not normal for me. But that day I relived in my dream the horrible scene that had occurred just a few hours ago, with the only difference being that all of the people involved were, well, we were animated drawings. We were all cartoons taken straight out of comics or movies. There were characters from the cartoons that I had read as a kid even to the newer shows that my son watches on tv, that I watch too if I have nothing else to do, I mean, only to keep him company, of course. So I had been right! The Pakistani was from The Simpsons... Apu, that one, Apu I think that's his name; the driver of the truck, on the other hand, was the little brother from "The Daltons," and I had the face of that

superhero Roberto Alcázar. The guy on the motorcycle was Son Goku from “Dragonball Z”; although the helmet hid part of his face, and his red track suit was similar to the one that my wife made for our son a few years ago for the carnival. The girl looked like Pocahontas and the bystanders who gathered around the accident taking the pictures were all of characters from Tintin. That little cartoon man, Rompetechos was questioning a lamppost about what had happened. Another character, Doraemon was taking god knows what out of his stomach, and Mafalda was cursing out the world... Ah, well yes, I shouldn’t say it, but I bet you’re going to ask me anyway. In my dream Bernarda was... I mean they don’t look alike in real life, I assure you, but you know how dreams are. Bernarda, just kidding, Agent María José San Bernardo (please don’t tell anyone that I told you this), Bernarda was that creepy witch... Doña Urraca. Oh and the ambulance drivers were Papa Smurf and Smurfette. Overall, a pretty ridiculous dream, as you can see, I don’t even know why I’m telling you this... Well, in the end of the dream they put Son Goku in the ambulance and drove away with the sirens on. On the back doors of the ambulance there was a sign that said “To be continued...” My son whacked me on the arm and I woke up. Everyone was already getting up and leaving the theatre. I asked him if he liked the movie, but he didn’t answer. Once we got home, I told my wife that I wasn’t hungry and I went straight to bed.

**Edurne Echevarría, age 26, the waiting room of San Juan de Dios Psychiatric Hospital, Gesalibar Auzoa, Arrasate (Guipúzcoa).**

It all happened in an instant, as if time had expanded. As if the world was like a giant soap bubble exploding in mid-air. Very slowly, it breaks into a bunch of smaller bubbles that

float and eventually pop on the asphalt, until they either hit the ground a couple of times and disappear, or they rise with a gust of air and continue floating on. Somehow, I was the one who woke up and now I'm a wandering soap bubble; Iñaki bursted on the asphalt and disappeared.

We were doing a motorcycle road trip from Bilbao to Madrid. We met a couple of months ago at a strike in Gasteiz, where I was studying medicine and he worked as a graphic designer at a local worker's union. Although he never found out, I was actually at that protest by a complete coincidence. I don't even remember what it was about. I think that it was a protest that had something to do with the ETA Basque terrorist group, but I'm not sure. Anyway, the day that we met I had gotten out of class and passed by all of those people with banners, they were shouting and laughing. Or maybe the protest was for something else... I don't remember. But it seemed like more of a party, really, that I do remember. It was sunny, the people were happy, passing around beer and bottles of wine, hand in hand, once in awhile you would get a strong whiff of pot... Hey, speaking of, you wouldn't happen to know where I can get some around here? They don't allow smoking here. I mean I only do it for medicinal purposes, you know in certain countries they even prescribe it to the terminal ill. I mean, I'm not terminal, but they say that it helps with mental conditions and all that... Anyway, no worries, if you come to see me again bring me some, okay? Alright. Where was I? Oh yeah, the strike. So, there I was on the sidewalk with Iratxe, my friend from college, watching all of the rowdy protesters, waiting to be able to cross the street, when suddenly someone inside the mass of people called Iratxe's name, I don't know if it was her boyfriend or a friend. Follow me, Iratxe said, I'm going to introduce you to some of my friends, so she shoved her way through the crowd. I tried to followed her, but someone knocked my folder to the ground and all of my notes went flying. When I was picking



up all of my papers, someone next to me started to help. He stopped people from walking all over them, yet also stopped me from carrying on. It was Iñaki, but at that point we didn't know each other. After introducing myself, I went looking all around for Iratxe, but I couldn't find her anywhere. Iñaki had also lost his friends. He had messy hair, green eyes, and a contagious smile. We stayed at the protest for a little while and later went to hang out at a café. And now I can't stop thinking that if I had never dropped my notes... that Iñaki would still be alive.

- Excuse me, it's time to take your pills.
- Come in, nurse, come in. Thank you, nurse. All's good here, nurse. Yes. Goodbye nurse!

Man, I hate that lady. Anyway. What else do you want to know? Yeah, so two or three days after we left Bilbao we arrived in Madrid and that's where we got in that accident... We were... We were going... No, no, don't worry, it's fine, the doctors told me that I need to start talking about it. That if I don't talk about it, I will never overcome it. So we were riding the motorcycle on a busy street downtown, I have no clue where, I think we were around Atocha, but don't hold me to it. Iñaki's cousin in Madrid didn't have room at his place, but he gave us the direction of a hostel and we were heading there when... well, we had been fighting earlier that day, it was our first fight. I think it was about something stupid, nothing serious, probably about something little like the way he was driving, from not putting his blinkers on, or something like that. So I was a little annoyed and then when he jumped that red light we almost hit an old man and a little girl, so I whacked him over the head and... and... then he... he turned to say *what the hell* Edurne, and that's when he didn't see it... but I did... he didn't see the truck that was coming and... I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, but I can't, I just can't. Fuck! I can't do it! Please leave. Go! Leave me in peace! Get out of here! Get out! GET OUT!

### Chapter III: *Analyzing Frictions*

After reading the translated version and getting a taste of Martín Sánchez's tone and style, the reader now has the skills to start piecing together his or her own visual puzzle of the *Fricciones*. Martín Sánchez plays with literary devices such as irony, humor, and elements of fantasy to counterbalance some of the somber themes of death, loneliness, and madness. Martín Sánchez's sense of humor complements the casual tone of writing used to create specific characters and their quirky experiences in the *relatos*. Each of these literary components act as a new level that adds to the complexity of the large puzzle that is *Fricciones*. However, when it comes to translating, these individual components and Martín Sánchez's casual style lead to a difficult process because it is challenging to reproduce the original intrinsic qualities of the piece while also striving for approachability and coherence. In this chapter I have included two separate parts with different forms of analysis. The first part is a reflection on the techniques and methods employed during the lengthy process of translating the *relatos*. The second consists of a critical analysis of the work itself, to discuss the literary devices that Martín Sánchez uses and the themes and messages that the stories convey.

#### Part I: The Trials and Tribulations of Translation

The task of translating *Fricciones* and making it accessible for an English-speaking readership has not been easy. In order to recognize the difficulties of translation, it is necessary to discuss the trials and tribulations that have surfaced throughout the process. While most believe that translating is an enriching and beneficial exercise, there are others who argue that it is truly impossible to recreate the original work for a new audience. My objective was to find the

right balance in between these two perspectives. Translating *Fricciones* has been an eye-opening and enjoyable experience; however, there were moments throughout the journey when I began to question the legitimacy and accuracy of my translation. In this first part of Chapter III, I reflect on the translation process and the challenges that I faced. In order to explain these troubles, I use textual examples from the *relatos*, but above all, I use the story “Accident” because it provides the reader with a good representation of *Fricciones* as a whole. The main roadblocks that I found while translating are: cultural references, casual tone, polysemic words, and not to mention, Martín Sánchez’s unique sense of humor. But for the reader, whom may have never experienced the difficulties of recreating a work in a new language, observing these situations will complement his or her understanding of and appreciation for translation.

One of the most difficult obstacles that I encountered while translating *Fricciones* is not the slang words or nuanced differences in syntax, yet the cultural references that are so integral to the *relatos*. Martín Sánchez alludes to specific cities, streets, and restaurants in Spain, or even classic Spanish TV shows, jokes, newspapers, and comics. With that being said, the Spanish reader finds a very comfortable, fictional niche within the stories and shares this personal space with Martín Sánchez. It is in this way that he uses these cultural references to establish a natural, casual tone, and to create a more intimate relationship with the reader. “Accident” is a *relato* that is riddled with specific information and local references. For instance, there are exact street names in Madrid, special types of traditional Spanish drinks (*un carajillo*: a coffee with liqueur, which most English-speakers would call an “Irish coffee”), and classic Basque names like Iratxe and Iñaki, that may sound completely foreign to a native English speaker. The problem with these cultural references is that the task of the translator is to keep the originality of the first

version; however, he or she wants to avoid incomodating the reader of the new text by speaking of a concept or term that he or she is not familiar with. The compromise that the translator must make in this situation ultimately comes down to deciding just *how much* the original should be changed.

In the lecture “On the Different Methods of Translating” published in 1813, philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher refers to these complicated decisions for the translator and different methods of translation through methods called domestication or foreignization. He states that, “Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader toward him, or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author toward him” (42). Schleiermacher creates this analogy of the possibilities of spatial relationships that can exist between the author and the reader with the translator as an intermediary form. By foreignizing the translation, the work remains unfamiliar to the new reader. When using this method there is a preservation of the author’s original essence, but it forces the reader to work harder in order to connect to a culture that may not be his or her own. On the other hand, another option according to Schleiermacher is to domesticate cultural references, changing the original subject and catering to the reader’s cultural sphere. The translator must decide in the moment which option is best suited for both the work and the author.

The most difficult cultural reference that I translated was found in the *relato*, “Accident”. The cop falls asleep in the movie theatre and dreams about the accident that happened earlier on that day. In his dream, all of the people involved in the scene of the accident were Spanish cartoon characters like Roberto Alcázar, Rompetechos, Mafalda, and Doña Urraca. This is a problematic situation because the English reader will likely not be familiar with these Spanish

characters. According to Schleiermacher's theory, there are only two methods to solve this situation. The first option consists of domesticating the translation, changing these allusions to be more commonly known cartoon characters for the new reader to feel comfortable. However, my understanding was that following this method implied a violation of Martín Sánchez's originality and creativity. In the end, I opted for the foreignization method by leaving the cartoon references unchanged. Although, in order for the readers to not feel at loss, I chose to include small phrases of contextual description.

Many *relatos* include similar problems with cultural references. In "9 Rue Truffaut" the translator is confronted with a linguistic difference between European and American word choice in English. This story describes "you", as the protagonist, on the way to your apartment in Paris after a day of work. The first words are, "Al salir del metro..." ("When you get out of the metro"). In the English language there are various ways to say "metro," but all terms refer back to the same concept of an underground system of transportation. An English speaker from the United Kingdom would likely say "tube" or "underground"; however, in most cities in the United States, like New York City for instance, people say the "subway". This is an interesting conundrum for linguists and translators. How do these varieties of words come to existence, and how do they spread? What makes the "subway" different from the "metro"? These questions may not have concrete answers, but it is important to note the fact that a word like this depends primarily on the location, context, and upbringing of the speaker. I justified my translation with the fact that a Parisian would say "metro," and this character lives in Paris. Thus, I followed the foreignization method once more.

Another difficulty that I came across while translating “Accident” was the complication of translating Martín Sánchez’s casual writing style. In all of the *relatos*, Martín Sánchez writes in a relaxed tone. But occasionally, this colloquial register alternates and contrasts with a different, linguistically refined manner of speaking. For example, think of the differences in vocal register, the vocabulary and tone, of Moho (the swearing truck driver from “Accident”) versus Tentorea (the romantic world-traveler from “The Tragicomedy of Mefito and Tentorea”). This literary choice makes for a more interesting and nonchalant narrative, which is necessary for the translator to reestablish in the target language. In “Accident” the narrator is in constant rotation, each storyteller shares their own personal account of the accident in a one-on-one conversation with an investigator. The unique personality traits of each narrator permeates the way that they talk. As a general observation of the dialogue, the characters speak slowly, and frequently say “no sé” (“I don’t know”) or “sabe” (“You know”). This choice of tone makes the reader feel as though he or she is witnessing a private conversation between the investigator and the witness. However, it can be difficult to translate these casual filler phrases and the relaxed tone because it is a matter of style, which is an underlying quality of the work that is usually more complicated to reconstruct than words.

In this short story, there are many moments when the narrator’s casual tone was difficult to translate. For instance, the grandfather refers to his granddaughter as an “inquieto culo” (146) which literally translates as “restless bum” or “ass” but in a figurative context it really means “antsy” or “fidgety”. This is a colloquial phrase that any non-native Spanish speaker will most likely not relate to. Martín Sánchez also creates colorful characters in his *relatos* by using slang. While reading the accident report from the perspective of a truck driver, he and a friend adopt a

colorful vocabulary. The man curses at his friend, “joder, macho” (151), calling him a fucker, which adds flavor to the narrative. There are many curses in the stories, another example is at the end of “Slumber”, when the protagonist walks out into a world where everyone is asleep. In a dramatic effort to understand the chaos, he leaps on top of a car and screams, “Pero se puede saber qué cojones es esto?”(16). Now, in this instance there is a great deal of pressure on the translator to recreate the frantic and fearful component of this question because it is the grand finale of the *relato*. Although, the word “cojones” in Spanish technically means “balls”, so the translator cannot literally translate this phrase as “But can one know what the balls is this?”. Nonetheless, one cannot always regard language in a literal sense, because that would make for a very unnatural translation. So, I decided to take the liberty of changing it to, “*what the fuck is going on?!*” which I think captures both aspects of the original phrase, the casualness of cursing in the street, and the fear and distress of being the only conscious human on Earth.

It is vital for a translator to maintain Martín Sánchez’s unique choice of word style because it gives a more entertaining and believable personality to not only the characters, but the *relato* itself, and in extension, all of *Fricciones*. In the section of “Accident” from the perspective of the young granddaughter, Clara, abbreviates the word “la señorita” (“teacher”) to “la seño” (153). It is not rare for children in primary or secondary school to use this expression, and it is in no way a negative title. While no native english-speaker would say “teach” or “prof,” we may instead say Ms. or Mrs. as an informal way to refer to the teacher. Although, what is really important here is that the translator preserves this playful, child-like quality of language. In another instance, Edurne, a different character from “Accident” brings up “maría o hachís” (160), which are slang words for pot. The translator cannot overlook these important literary

choices made by Martín Sánchez because every word has a purpose, and equally as the original, the English version also strives to create unique characters, along with accuracy and relatability of tone and word choice.

Another interesting literary technique that was difficult to translate is Martín Sánchez's use of other languages, neither Spanish or English, in his *relatos*. These moments can be difficult to translate; however, it is necessary to recreate a similar worldliness or foreignness for the reader in the translation. I would like to suggest that Martín Sánchez adds these other cultural and linguistic references in order to accomplish two goals in his writing: the first being to build to the unique personality traits of the characters, and the second, to create a more sophisticated and worldly experience for the reader. For instance, in "The Tragicomedy of Mefito and Tentorea" both characters have unique personalities, and Martín Sánchez highlights this with the use of other languages. Tentorea is meant to be a mature and cultured girl, so while translating I chose to maintain the occasional "au revoir" and "dankeshon par tout" and "a rivederci" in the original languages. Along with adding this flavor to his characters, Martín Sánchez also uses other languages to tailor the reading experience and to inspire the readers to ask questions. The *relato* "Slumber" ends with a momentous and jarring line in latin, "urbi et orbi" which is a Papal address that means "to the city [Rome] and to the world" in English. But, Martín Sánchez leaves further interpretation of this line up to the reader.

While all of these recounts are difficult to translate, the most challenging part of translation is when there is no compromise to be made because there is no direct translation to a word or concept. One of the *relatos*, "Redacción II" ("Composition II" included in Appendix B) is written and narrated by the same character who wrote "Redacción I" ("Composition I")



included in Chapter II). We find out in later in “Accident” that the narrator is a young boy named Marcos, who enjoys writing stories but never uses periods. “Redacción II” is about a composition that Marcos hands in to his teacher, who says that there is no “point” to his writing. The pun here that is not translatable into English is that in Spanish the words “point” and “period” are the same (*punto*). In English, there are two different words, “point” and “period” that aren’t interchangeable and do not function the same. So the entire *relato* is based off of this pun regarding the lack of clarity and punctuation in Marcos’s writing. However, the humor and wit of the pun cannot be recreated in the English version. It is completely lost in translation. I came to accept these linguistic limitations and the fact that it is not a duty of a translator to always force a new word upon the reader, or to create a new pun. On the other hand, this experience shows the reality of translation, that certain parts of a language do not cooperate in another, which in itself for the translator can be frustrating, yet also fascinating.

## Part II: Critical Analysis of *Fricciones*

After having read the translations and my personal reflection on the process, the reader is now aware of the specific literary components that Martín Sánchez works with, for instance: his humor, casual tone, and use of cultural references. These elements not only flavor Martín Sánchez’s distinct writing style, but also improve the distinctive personalities of the protagonists and aids in developing an intimate bond between Martín Sánchez and the reader. Along with the strong presence of these literary devices, the *relatos* also contain a variety of recurring themes. While each short story has different characters, settings, and plotlines, they all inspire the reader

to ask similar questions about the individual's role in an ever-changing modern society. These questions and the unpredictable chain of events that occur in the *relatos*, urge the reader to reflect on his or her own identity and personal relationship with the shared human experiences of death, loneliness, and madness. These three main themes reappear throughout *Fricciones* as obstacles that the characters must live with or overcome. The themes are complemented by the presence of the unexpected connections between characters and the prominent role that destiny plays in everyday life, in order to subtly hint at the social, academic, and psychological constraints that society places upon the individual. By reviewing these themes and ideas in relation to specific examples from the *relatos*, the reader will become acquainted and comfortable with these complicated concepts.

The first main theme that appears in *Fricciones* is the prominent, yet at times eerie repetition of death. Martín Sánchez's unique collection of troubled protagonists often find themselves staring directly into the unfamiliar eyes of death. Throughout the stories, the reader may notice that Martín Sánchez always toils with the idea of death and pushes his characters to their limits. By doing so, the author reflects on a broader perspective about what death means to the individual, modern day society, and also, all of fiction literature. Regarding the largest perspective of literature, the repetition of death urges the reader to question, does a fictional character ever actually die? Or does the imaginary legend live on forever? In "9, Rue Truffaut" the protagonist throws himself off of a balcony. In "Accident" when the reader laments the death of a man in a mysterious motorcycle accident. And in the "Tragicomedy of Mefito and Tentorea" the reader stumbles across yet another suicide that mimics the classic, romantic tragedy of

Romeo and Juliet, which on a different level of analysis can also be viewed as an example of Martín Sánchez's exploration as writing as a form of rewriting.

There is a unique example of death in "Looking from Under the Roots of Flowers" when Martín Sánchez imposes death on the implied reader by placing him or her directly into the narrative and saying "you smell like death" (22). The empirical reader may feel uncomfortable or disconcerted with this jarring use of the pronoun *you* because he or she is essentially reading a detailed passage of his or her own death. The narrator continues to explain the horrifying event of *you* waking up in a coffin and ends the story questioning whether "one can still think after death" (22), which brings a new plane of existential analysis into the reading experience. Could this recurring theme of death only be a coincidence? Or could Martín Sánchez be insinuating an underlying message of the inevitability of death? These examples may make the reader ponder the commonality of death and question the possibility of an afterlife. What lies after death for humans, and why does there only exist one way to find out?

Not only does Martín Sánchez use the repetition of death as a theme to bring his readers onto a common frame of thought, but he also personifies death to make the daunting stigma more humorous and accessible to the readers. The *relato* "Rigor Mortis" begins with the ironic entrance of Death herself as a casual female character wearing ripped jeans and a t-shirt. From depicting death in such a nonchalant tone, Martín Sánchez is not only avoiding the commonly known figure of the grim reaper (which one could view as an Oulipian method of avoiding tradition), but he is also insinuating the commonality and mysterious unpredictability of death. The protagonist argues with Death and both characters claim to identify themselves as death. When Death recognizes that she has made an error, the protagonist assumes the role of Death,

saying, “It’ll be another time then” (25). As the original Death walks out of the building, the protagonist, the newly proclaimed Death, shoots her down with a rifle. This thematic presence of fatality and destiny seems to constantly hover over both the characters and readers. By creating an unidentified character who literally comes face to face with Death, the reader sees that death is not such a foreign concept after all. And by taking authority over Death and killing her, Martín Sánchez sheds lights on the unquestioned lack of human agency belonging to the contemporary subject.

Along with the unavoidable presence of death, there is also the common theme of loneliness that consistently reappears in *Fricciones*. Martín Sánchez's protagonists often struggle with being alone, almost as if they are uncomfortable living with anyone else, or uncomfortable in their own skin. These protagonists are all transfixed by their loneliness, which eventually drives them to madness. Martín Sánchez hardly ever addresses the loneliness directly in *Fricciones*, but it seems to be a perpetual looming concern, always impending the characters' ability to persevere and weighing them down. In the first *relato*, “Slumber” a man wakes up and steps outside only to realize that everyone else is asleep. While walking through the silent streets, he realizes that he is the only human awake in the entire world. He quickly becomes worried, frantically runs around screaming. In “9 Rue Truffaut” the protagonist is *you*. While walking back to your apartment alone, you see other people happily hugging, smiling, and laughing. Upon arriving at your apartment, you suddenly kill yourself with no further explanation. Many *relatos* have protagonists that face similar issues with loneliness and depression, and occasionally this depression leads to madness. Within doing so, Martín Sánchez could be insinuating that everyone has a dark, uncontrollable part of the inner human psyche, or he also

could be addressing the growing concern of the lost individual in a constantly expanding and changing society.

To continue this theme of loneliness, many *relatos* allude to idea of being “the other”, an outsider on the margins of an external community. Martín Sánchez often uses his stories as a literary lens to zoom into the internalized thoughts of an individual. As a result, Martín Sánchez is able to examine how this network of internal thoughts situates in relation to the external world. Many of the characters find themselves to be misunderstood, or unable to join and become one with the masses. In “Rubik’s Cube” Martín Sánchez mixes up the discoveries of some of the world’s most famous thinkers, Socrates, Descartes, and Einstein. He twists the historical accounts to show that each of the thinkers were not quite as radical and courageous as previously thought. They are shunned by their communities, and unable to communicate their true discoveries. The reader can also see this idea of zooming in to focus on one character in the *relato*, “It was Around 3:20” when he or she reads different accounts, various streams of consciousness of three unsuspecting pedestrians on the street. Amongst the business of the city, people walking and cars honking, this short story narrows the focus for a moment in order to observe at a smaller scale how an ordinary mind functions amidst the daily chaos of society. It is in this way that the reader is able to view an internal microcosm of thoughts, juxtaposed against the constant, fast-paced macrocosmic universe. Perhaps by creating *relatos* that allow for this type of close examination, Martín Sánchez intended to unite his readership on a similar, approachable ground, while also highlighting the smallness and fragility of human life compared to the vast world.

This concept of human fragility holds a strong presence in *Fricciones*. The reader becomes a witness to the countless moments when the characters question their lives again and again, suggesting the lack of human agency. The fragility of human life goes hand in hand with the heavy themes of death and loneliness because it creates a sensation for the reader that each character is only holding on to his or her existence by a small thread of sheer luck. Martín Sánchez often creates vulnerable characters and places them in polarized, potentially dangerous situation. For instance, think of the innocent squished spider in “Composition I” or the grandfather who almost gets run over in “Accident”. These clashes between man and society appear frequently throughout the *relatos* and create an overall sensation of smallness and insignificance for the reader. The fact that the characters seem to have little control over their own lives provides the *relatos* with a questioning, self-reflective nature, and suggests the power that Martín Sánchez holds over his fiction.

Throughout the majority of the *relatos*, the third theme that works in conjunction with death and loneliness, is madness. Martín Sánchez’s authority as the original creator allows him to play with the minds of the readers and blur the lines between fiction and reality. Thus, leading the readers to question the notion of insanity. Martín Sánchez explores this concept in *Fricciones* by creating a wide variety of characters whose wits and patience are often tested by daily struggles. Whether these characters are misunderstood, lonely, obsessive, suicidal, or actually in a mental institution, each protagonist shows a certain degree of madness. A good example of this theme is the story “Rubik’s Cube”. By misconstruing the facts about Einstein, labeling him as a crazy, and by imagining a new famous genius (Axel Browling) the narrator seems to play with the past and test the knowledge and dedication of the readers. Appropriately, the readers then

begin to question the significance of public knowledge, fame, and the legitimacy behind being “sane” or “understood”. Other examples of madness can be found in “The Underlined is Yours” when you stay up late reading Borges, “The Solitude of Mirrors” when you spend so much time looking in a mirror, that your face distorts and you turn into a monster, and “And then there are Dentists” when you go to hell and back in the dentist’s office. In all of these examples, Martín Sánchez uses the second pronoun, “you”, in order to impose the disturbing chaos and madness on the reader. Just as a mirror distorts a reflection, Martín Sánchez has the ability to distort the perceived reality until it is uncertain who is at question, the protagonist or the reader.

Along with these three apparent themes and as mentioned briefly before, there is a strong presence of all concepts relating to destiny, human agency, and connections. From observing this collection of *relatos* as one whole entity, the reader can see that certain characters, words, and situations reappear under different circumstances. All of the *relatos* are somehow subtly tied together, which alludes to the inconspicuous connections of human lives. For instance, in “It was Around 3:20” Martín Sánchez examines many meaningless details of a passing between two seemingly normal pedestrians; this situation that could be completely arbitrary turns into an existential self reflection. Each character scrutinizes the space between them on the street and imagines the inner thoughts and life of the other. These brief glances that the characters exchange have the ability to strongly affect a character’s mood or development. At the end of the *relato*, the protagonist hears the screeching brakes of the motorcycle that appears in “Accident”. These “eureka” moments of interconnectivity (that I mentioned in the first chapter) create an entertaining interplay of dramatic experiences, while also suggesting the smallness of human beings in the external world.

Along with having the themes and characters of the *relatos* make friction with one another, Martín Sánchez also creates a sense of friction with *Fricciones* as an artistic work inside of the large sphere of contemporary fiction literature. One of the Oulipo beliefs that Martín Sánchez has carried with him into the production of *Fricciones* is the idea that writing is merely a form of repetition. He refers to this technique as, “fragmenting the idea of writing into rewriting, making friction with other readings, authors, and texts”. Depending on the reader’s familiarity with specific Oulipo works, he or she may have not recognized all of the subtle references that Martín Sánchez makes in his *relatos*. Other than rewriting history in “Rubik’s Cube”, there are a few connections that I have made regarding specific images and ideas that Martín Sánchez has incorporated into his work and woven in a mix of traditional and contemporary thought.

The *relato* “The Solitude of Mirrors” can be seen as a play off of the original idea of art as imitation from Plato’s *The Republic*, and yet again, a modern representation on this same idea from Borges’s *The Aleph*. One of the main principles of Plato’s argument is that artistic creation is imitation, and when explaining this to Glauco, he says, “The quickest way is to take a mirror and turn it round in all directions; before long you will create sun and stars and earth, yourself and all other animals and plants, and furniture and the other objects we mentioned just now” (423). This idea of turning a mirror repeatedly until you distort reality is precisely what happens in “The Solitude of Mirrors”. Martín Sánchez, along with other Oulipian members, would agree with this platonian philosophy of imitation and originality. In the short story, *The Aleph*, Borges takes this idea to the next level and incorporates his own bizarre fictional twists. He describes an aleph as a mirror that reflects everything in the universe: “I saw, close up, unending eyes



watching themselves in me as in a mirror; I saw all the mirrors on earth and none of them reflected me” (27). After this moment of examination, Borges digresses into a hellish spiral of internal thoughts and random, surrealistic images such as astrolabes, tigers, and rotted dust, which is exactly what Martín Sánchez does in “The Solitude of Mirrors”. At one point in Martín Sánchez story the narrator says, “The mirror is now an immense watching eye, an imposter cyclops, that has taken over your very own self, an aleph that reflects all of your masks”. Unquestionably, Martín Sánchez was channeling his inner Borges when writing this sentence because he uses the common borgesian images of the eye, the aleph, and the mask. These two references that may have inspired Martín Sánchez reinforce his work because this idea of an infinite mirror distorts reality and reflects all of humanity, which ultimately is one of the functions of *Fricciones*.

Another possible connection that pulls *Fricciones* into a larger-scale dialogue with other fiction literature is in the *relato* “And then there are Dentists”, when “you” go to the dentist, but actually end up in hell. For any readers that have been previously exposed to French author and Oulipo member George Perec (1936-1982), this plot may sound familiar. In Perec’s *La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams*, a book consisting of diary entries of his dreams, he wrote about a specific dream (No. 5) that sounds coincidentally like “And then there are Dentists”. Part of the anecdote is, “I run into a tiny woman, pretty and cheerful. It’s the dentist. She leads me to the waiting room [...] My mouth is so large, and the dentist so small, that I suspect she is going to put her whole head in my mouth” (Burdick). It sounds like Martín Sánchez took this idea as a basis for his *relato*, and ran with it. A similar experience happened in “And then there are Dentists”, but the dentist ends up being completely submerged into “your” mouth. These ideas seem too similar for

it to be merely a coincidence. Plus, it would make sense for Martín Sánchez to be inspired by Georges Perec because they share similar Oulipo writing values. But the important matter at hand, is the fact that both of these stories take the boring, mundane activity of going to the dentist and turns it into a traumatizing, nightmare experience. This act of exchanging reality with fiction resonates well with Martín Sánchez's intent in *Fricciones*.

As one can see from this lengthy analysis and the seemingly endless possibilities of thematic discussion about *Fricciones*, there are many external literary references and real-life applicable messages that Martín Sánchez has incorporated into his *relatos*. Nevertheless, because of the fragmented, fictional nature of *Fricciones*, it is impossible to determine *one* overarching meaning of the entire work. Instead, it operates under the function of adding a little piece of fiction into each aspect of the monotonous routine of human reality and pushing the boundaries of the fiction genre. Martín Sánchez examines the roles that death, loneliness, madness, and agency play in an average human's life from a humorous and approachable perspective. He also uses the *relato* to obtain a quick glimpse of each character's life, and they all play an important role in Martín Sánchez's fiction network. By creating this imaginary world of involved characters, he creates a complex system and plays with internal thoughts in external spaces. Furthermore, from exploring the endless possibilities of his fictitious characters, he examines how the events surrounding these themes affect not only the character, but his or her external societal sphere as well. The reader can analyze this concept in reference to his or her own inner thoughts on and relationship to society.

### Conclusion: The Last Pieces of the Puzzle

When I asked Martín Sánchez where he got the idea for *Fricciones* in an email interview, he responded with, “It’s difficult to say.” It all began with an anecdote from a college professor regarding a minor spelling error that occurred in a publication of Borges’s previously mentioned book, *Ficciones*. A french publishing company, Éditions Gallimard, accidentally wrote the title as *Frictions*, and this small typographical mistake incidentally inspired Martín Sánchez to create his literary brainchild, *Fricciones*. Inspired by Borges’s profound inventiveness, *Fricciones*, is closely related to *Ficciones* because the two are both collections of short stories, whirlwinds of bizarre encounters that straddle in between the realms of fantasy and reality. This idea of writing and rewriting, creating a work that incorporates ideas from previous literature is represented in *Fricciones* because many of Martín Sánchez’s stories resonate with Borges’s central focuses on dreaming, time, labyrinths, mirrors, and destiny. Martín Sánchez said that, “In the summer of 2005, I decided that the moment had arrived.” So after six months of dedicated writing, *Fricciones* was produced.

This project has not only introduced me to a new work and tested my skills as a reader and translator, but it has also made me question the entire term and concept of fiction. From viewing and taking part in rewriting *Fricciones* in a new language, I have come to fully imagine how Martín Sánchez has constructed a literary world in which he is able to play with the conventional idea of fiction. If you will, he is *frictioning* with fiction. If we view the word “fiction” from an etymological sense, one may note that the Latin root of the word “fiction” is  *fingere* (to form, or contrive), in this definition, imagining fiction as a means of construction or invention. The word “fiction” in a literary sense is more widely known as any sort of imaginary

construction, be it a character, event, or setting. While literary fiction is based on imagination, it does not necessarily have to contradict or oppose reality. In the case of *Fricciones*, Martín Sánchez's fiction is built off of reality, which leads the reader into a believable new construct of existential being.

As the reader is slowly weaved through the web of perspectives in Martín Sánchez's collection of *relatos*, he or she meets new characters and experiences personal loss and growth with these imaginary people. The process of recreating this network of experiences in a new language has shown me that the strength of Martín Sánchez's writing lies in his ability to experiment with the constraints of fiction. Throughout the translation process, I have come to terms with similar limitations as I have accepted that at times when translating there are inevitable obstacles that cannot be compromised or resolved. On the other hand, this process has been extremely enriching, as I have been introduced to a world of new ideas and questions regarding the role that contemporary fiction literature plays in modern society. The few main roadblocks that I faced while translating include the difficulty of recreating cultural references and reproducing such a specific sense of humor for a new audience. While these tasks may have proven to be difficult at times, now they seem to be essential part of the translation experience. In order to recreate the original version for a different readership, it is key for the translator to come to terms with that fact that translation is, and always will be, a give and take of material.

If we return to the puzzle analogy of *Fricciones*, viewing Martín Sánchez's collection as both a refined piece of literature and a game or experimentation, we notice that the metaphorical puzzle of ideas is now close to becoming complete. In the summary on the back cover of *Fricciones*, Martín Sánchez explains that *Fricciones* is, "un impecable puzzle literario en el que

todas las piezas deben encajar al final” (“an impeccable literary puzzle in which all of the pieces should fall into place at the end”). While this project only offers twelve of the twenty-seven *relatos*, the reader can already develop a sense of which puzzle pieces have been incorporated, as well as which puzzle pieces are still yet to be found. From the *relatos* that I selected to translate for *Frictions*, the pieces of the literary puzzle are the components that have remained intrinsic to or representative of the original *Fricciones* experience. These elements consist of Martín Sánchez’s clever wit and humor, the unique constant rotation of characters, the casual tone of writing, the presence of death, loneliness, and madness, the question of originality in friction, the act of rewriting history, and finally, the concept of fate. Each of these integral pieces work in conjunction to create the eccentric and memorable experience of *Fricciones*.

Another possible perspective to visualize the puzzle of *Fricciones*, is imagining that each piece of the puzzle is a self-sufficient individual *relato*. While *Fricciones* is separated by stories that may initially seem irrelevant because they differ in subject and length, in actuality, the stories are “united by that which separates them” (Nacach). What separates the *relatos* is not only the physical fragmentation of the collection as a whole, but the variation of characters and themes. The subtle connections that are made when the *relatos* intersect seem to frequently relate to similar themes regarding the common human experiences of death, loneliness, and madness. For example, take into consideration the end of “It was Around 3:20” when the girl hears the motorcycle crash in “Accident”, or how the boy, Marcos, who writes “Composition I”, casually reappears as the boyfriend of the granddaughter in “Accident”. Martín Sánchez has incorporated these surprising links so skillfully and indirectly into the narrative that they are easily overlooked while reading. However, it was necessary to translate these moments of connection because this

effect adds to the shock value when, upon finishing the book, the reader is finally able to put two and two together.

I find that these moments of intersection are the most fascinating instances in *Fricciones*. Not only do these moments add to the entertainment of the reading experience, but they also excite the reader, providing him or her with a particular “eureka” feeling (perhaps similar to that of the dentist when he climbs in *your* mouth in “And then there are Dentists”). When I asked Martín Sánchez about these connections between the *relatos*, he explained: “Cada uno de los *relatos* es un guiño a otro *relato*, a otro autor, a otro libro, una parte de una frase, una imagen, un personaje” [Each of the *relatos* is a wink to another *relato*, another author, a book, a part of a phrase, an image, or a character]. In clarifying his intentions we can be reassured that the reappearance of characters and the repetition of themes is not merely a coincidence. And due to the realistic, everyday, casual quality of the *relatos*, this interconnectivity insinuates that there exists such an inconspicuous overlap of people, experiences, and literature in reality.

It is natural at this point for the reader to question the scientific and realistic applications of these connections that are made in *Fricciones*. Where do they arise? And why do they matter? This interconnectivity of fictitious characters and elements can be thought of in reference to the popular scientific concept called the “Six Degrees of Separation Theory”, proposed by American social psychologist Stanley Milgram in the 1960s. Milgram believed that every human being was somehow connected to another through six levels of networking. In Albert-László Barabási’s book, *Linked: The New Science of Networks*, he explores this concept and explains how human beings naturally and unknowingly construct society around them: “Being connected requires very little—barely more than one social link per person. As we all have many more than one

link, each of us is a part of the giant network that we call society” (30). This comment, along with Milgram’s theory, explains why we always find ourselves repeating the trite expression, “It’s a small world”.

*Fricciones* can be seen as a reflection of and upon Milgram’s concept. Martín Sánchez’s *Fricciones* is the ultimate test of a contemporary writer, as he creates his own “small world”, his own fictional society and social system inside the text. From playing with the repetition of writing, rewriting, and making friction within his fiction, Martín Sánchez plays with the “Six Degrees of Separation Theory” and pushes the metafictional and metaphorical boundaries of his own fictional world. As shown in the *relatos*, we tend to focus in on only one individual’s behavior, which makes it easy to get lost inside the inner mechanisms of one’s thoughts and forget about the macrocosmic, external network of society that we are a part of. Textual illustrations of this social phenomenon can be found in *relatos* like “The Solitude of Mirrors” and “It was Around 3:20”, when the author gets caught up inside the microcosmic internal world of a character who momentarily forgets about the infinite macrocosm of life that surrounds him or her. This fictional juxtaposition of the small-scale individual’s interactions with the daunting immenseness of our entire social system leads the reader to question how this network of society affects our daily behavior, and vice versa, how one’s individual choices also can affect society as a whole.

In José Ortega y Gasset’s seminal essay, “The Misery and Splendor of Translation”, he weighs *la gracia y desgracia* of translation, arguing both for and against translation’s benefits. After considering negative aspects of translation in modern day society: the invisibility of the translator and the impossibility of conveying a new “system of verbal signs” (95). He finally

recognizes the beauty and necessity of translation. He comes to the conclusion that despite the innumerable difficulties of translation, it is worth the struggle. He addresses the “splendor” of translating by commenting that, “The simple fact is that the translation is not the work, but a path toward the work”(109). On a personal level, this statement encourages me to not only appreciate this translation as a bound product of my senior year, yet as a proud culmination of my interpretations of Martín Sánchez’s originality. This quote also helps me recognize the role that this project has played in my life and the potential role that it could play in a larger perspective of the translation of contemporary fiction literature. From translating *Fricciones*, I hope to have, first and foremost, succeeded in making a previously inaccessible, unique, and inspirational text now available to a new audience. But I also hope to have inspired my readers to be more aware of the fact that translation is not only a means of facilitating interlingual communication, but more so a new creative work of art.



## Appendix A: A Brief Interview with Pablo Martín Sánchez

This semester I had the pleasure of speaking with Martín Sánchez through email. I asked him a few questions regarding his career, *Fricciones*, and translation in general. Our conversations were always conducted in Spanish, however in this appendix I have also included translations of both my questions and Martín Sánchez's answers for the English reader. From getting this rare opportunity to speak with the author, I was able to hear his direct thoughts about his work. Martín Sánchez's wit and personable nature no doubt transfers into the humorous and casual tone of *Fricciones*.

### **¿De dónde surgió la idea para *Fricciones*?**

Es difícil decirlo. Yo empecé escribiendo cuentos y un día pensé: aquí hay un libro en potencia. Un profesor de la universidad, creo que fue Antoni Martí, nos explicó un día en clase la siguiente anécdota: al parecer, cuando Gallimard publicó en Francia a mediados del siglo XX el célebre libro de Borges *Ficciones*, en el catálogo de la editorial se coló una errata y escribieron *Friccions*, con erre. Tal vez la anécdota fuera apócrifa, pero yo pensé que si algún día llegaba a escribir aquel libro, lo titularía así, *Fricciones*. En el verano de 2005 decidí que había llegado el momento. Pedí una ayuda a la Fundación Sánchez Santos para Jóvenes Escritores y me la concedieron. De modo que me pasé seis meses dedicado únicamente a escribir y terminar el libro.

### ***Where did you get the idea for *Fricciones*?***

*It's difficult to say. I began writing stories and one day I thought: there is a potential book here. A university professor, I think it was Antoni Martí, once told us the following*

*anecdote: Apparently, in the middle of the twentieth century when Gallimard published Borges's famous book, Ficciones in France, an error slipped into the catalogue of the publishing house and they wrote Frictions, with an "r". Maybe the story was only a rumor, but I thought that if one day I was going to write this book, I would title it exactly that, Fricciones. In the summer of 2005, I decided that the moment had arrived. I applied for a scholarship from la Fundación Sánchez Santos for Young Writers and they granted me the necessary financial support. So then I spent six months dedicated only to writing and finishing the book.*

**He notado que su obra tiene mucho que ver con la filosofía de Oulipo. ¿Cuáles son sus pensamientos de la estructura y el formato "tradicional" de literatura y cómo quiso incorporar las ideas de Oulipo en *Fricciones*?**

Bueno, no creo que se pueda hablar de una «filosofía del Oulipo», pero aceptaremos pulpo como animal de compañía (risas). Yo siempre he comulgado con esa idea oulipiana de que la auténtica libertad está en elegir las propias cadenas. Es una concepción antirromántica, desde luego, que huye de la inspiración, el azar o las musas, y que parte de la idea lúdica de *contrainte* (constricción, restricción, traba) como método más seguro para alcanzar nuestro objetivo, que no es otro que el de poner unas letras detrás de las otras. *Fricciones* podría considerarse un libro oulipiano porque responde a una constricción: partiendo de la idea de que escribir es reescribir, friccionar con otras lecturas, autores, textos, cada uno de los relatos es un guiño a otro relato, a otro autor, a otro libro, a partir de una frase, una imagen, un personaje, una estructura, un estilo...

***I have noticed that your book has much to do with the Oulipo philosophy. What are your thoughts about the structure and format of “traditional” literature and how did you incorporate these ideas in Fricciones?***

*Well, I don't think that one can really speak of an “Oulipo philosophy”, but we'll take an octopus as a pet (Haha yeah right). I have always agreed with the Oulipo idea that authentic liberty is within choosing one's own chains. It is an anti-romantic concept, of course, that strays from the inspiration, and the idea of fate and muses. Part of the pleasure that comes from constraint, as the most safe method to reach our goal, is nothing less than putting some letters after others. Fricciones could be considered an Oulipo book because it responds to this constraint: fragmenting the idea of writing into rewriting, making friction with other readings, authors, texts, each of the relatos is a wink at another, and another author, another book, part of a phrase, an image, a person, or a style...*

**¿Cuál es el relato preferido de usted? ¿O cuál fue lo más divertido de escribir?**

Elegir uno siempre es complicado, es aquello de a quién quieres más, a mamá o a papá. Creo que es el primero que escribí de los que hay en el volumen fue «Tragicomedia de Mefito y Tentorea», así que podría elegir ese. Pero también «Poesía métrica» me ha dado muchas alegrías, pues ha sido publicado en diversas revistas y traducido a distintas lenguas, a pesar de la dificultad intrínseca. Y luego están los que han recibido premios, a los que no puedo dejar de mirar sin cierto orgullo de padre, como «Accidente», «El subrayado es tuyo» o «Un oficio peligroso». Ah, y a las «Redacciones» también les tengo mucho cariño, pues no solo me lo pasé muy bien escribiéndolas, sino que fueron interpretadas por dos amigos míos en la primera

presentación de *Fricciones* que hicimos en Madrid. En fin, ya ves, ¡me quedo con todos, incluso con los que acabaron fuera del libro! (más risas).

***Which is your favorite relato? Or which was the most fun for you to write?***

*Choosing one is always complicated, it's like answering the question who do you like more - mom or dad. I think I would choose the first one that I wrote for this collection, "The Tragicomedy of Mefito and Tentorea". But also "Metric Poetry" made me really happy, because it has been published in some magazines and translated into other languages, despite its intrinsic difficulty. And then there are also the stories that have received prizes, those that I can't stop looking at like a proud father, "Accident", "The Underlined is Yours", and "A Dangerous Job". Ah and yes I also really love the "Compositions" because not only did I enjoy writing them, but they were also interpreted by two friends in the first presentation that we did in Madrid. Overall, you see, I love all of them, even those that remain out of the book! (Haha)*

**¿Qué es el reto más difícil para usted cuándo traduce? ¿Tiene un proceso de traducción?**

Cada traducción te pide una cosa diferente, no es lo mismo traducir una novela policíaca (como estoy haciendo ahora) que un libro de Oulipo (lo que traduje anteriormente). Supongo que lo importante es saber adaptarse y utilizar las herramientas que te pide cada texto. Y luego, claro está, si eres un traductor profesional, tienes que intentar que tu ritmo de trabajo te permita subsistir, lo cual casi siempre es en perjuicio de la calidad de la traducción...

***What is the most difficult challenge for you when you translate? Do you have a process for translating?***

*Each translation asks a different thing from the translator, it is not the same translating a mystery novel (like I am doing now) versus an Oulipo book (what I previously translated). I suppose that what is important is to be aware of adapting and utilizing the tools that each text requires. And then, of course, if you are a professional translator, you have to make sure that the pace of your work allows you to survive, which can always be a detriment to the quality of your work...*

***¿Si tuviera que decir una cosa a los lectores de *Fricciones*, qué sería?***

Que salieran al campo a disfrutar.

***If you were to say one thing to the readers of *Fricciones*, what would it be?***

*That they head out to the countryside and enjoy.*

## Appendix B: Lost in Translation:

## REDACCIÓN (II)

Esta mañana la profe me ha dicho que mi redacción del otro día era nefasta, que si no sabía lo que era un punto y que si no podía escribir sin decir palabrotas, y yo le he dicho que no sólo sabía perfectamente lo que es un jodido punto sino que además mi texto estaba lleno de puntos, sobre todo encima de las is y de las jotas y que incluso me había permitido el lujo de poner tres puntos suspensivos y un punto y final, pero que si eso no le parecía suficiente por mí podía poner tantos puntos como le diese la gana, y que lo de las palabrotas no era asunto mío ya que yo no tenía ninguna culpa de que mis padres fuesen tan mal hablados y que seguro que ella también decía palabrotas cuando discutía con su marido, y entonces ella me ha dicho que no estaba casada y yo le he respondido que no me extrañaba, que quién la iba a aguantar con lo puntillosa que es, y entonces me ha mandado hacer otra redacción antes de salir corriendo hacia el lavabo y yo le he gritado que tampoco era para ponerse así, que esta vez iba a poner más puntos, joder, y que cuál era el tema de la redacción, pero ella ya había desaparecido por el fondo del pasillo, así que he vuelto a mi pupitre y como toda la clase me estaba mirando yo les he dicho que no se preocupasen, que era cosa de mayores y que en las cosas de mayores es mejor no meterse nunca y entonces he visto que la niña de delante me miraba con los mismos ojos que mi madre miraba a mi padre en la foto que hasta hace poco había en su habitación, y por primera vez en mi vida no he sabido adónde mirar... Y como tampoco sabía qué hacer con mis manos, me he puesto a escribir la redacción.

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