

Interview to Luisa Etxenike by Pilar Rodriguez, Ph.d, professor at Deusto University, in which the writer's literary production, aesthetic and artistic views are analyzed.

P. Luisa Etxenike, apart from other stories published independently in various collections, is the author of the novels *Side Effects*, *The Worst of Wrongs*, *Wine*, *Black Fish* and *The Blind Spot*, Euskadi Prize for Literature in Spanish 2008, and the story collection *Duelling Drills* published in 2001. The reference to the main formal features that characterize her work might serve as a starting point to explain the ethics and poetics of Luisa Etxenike. By developing a literary voice of her own, as noted for example by Ana Maria Moix in *Babelia* when she says, and I quote: "She's not a first-timer, but a fluent writer who has a perfect command of narrative and who is well aware of what she does: she builds a voice, she develops a writing that, increasingly refined, already has its own nature, making it recognizable by itself regardless of the story told". I find this very interesting, right? This voice of your own that makes you recognizable within the panorama of peninsular and even international literatures, I would say. I think a writer reaches a name and he or she reaches a style when it is possible to recognise him or her irrespective of the story told. That's what Ana Maria Moix says and that's what I believe is happening. I have characterized your narrative at some point as an effort to stylistic condensation and depuration, defined by the refinement of language. I said that words are offered with a gritty texture, direct, precise and poetic. And perhaps we can start from here, Luisa; tell us if you find these descriptions appropriate and what the guiding principle in your writing is.

L. Well, I think they are, first of all, appropriate and generous, I should say. Perhaps we can start with that idea of condensation and the idea of the voice: there is a character, Mariana Urrutia, from my last novel which we may discuss later, called *The Sound Tracker*, who says she has long sought the voice. Obviously she's referring to a voice that is in the plot of that story, but I too have

long sought the voice. I would say about the sound dimension that you know, or at least I know, that the style is right when the phrase sounds good, no matter what the sense of the words is, when there is a kind of sound composition, a melodic, harmonious composition. Perhaps we could say writing by ear. I always say the same thing, that my first connection with literature came from the stories I was told. And in that sense, that rhythmic pattern serves me as a beacon, it is an important guidance for me. The rest, the exactness, the condensation, has to do with it and, at the same time, with an aesthetic reflection, we could say, a bit more complex. I think that the notion of hindrance, which we find disgusting in all walks of life, in literature it creates or generates a much more particular or intense repulsion; in other words, everything has to be essential. But I was talking about a deeper aesthetic reflection because we live in a world -I never forget that I am a writer of the 21st century, that I was a writer in the 20th, and now I have to be one of the 21st- that is, at least, a world where there an extraordinary abundance of images, discourses and languages. In this forest, often chaotic and in any case quite overburdened, you need to find spaces for a fresh expression, or which may appear to be newborn. I think that the idea of the tension in the voice, the language, the style, the sentence is, in that sense, I would say, a fundamental aesthetic imperative. Just like the strings of a musical instrument, a guitar, for example; if they are out of tune, if they are not tense, they do not resonate. I think the condensation and sound dimension should have to do with that as well, with the need for maximum resonance of style.

P. If you allow me to delve a little deeper into these same notions, I have a quote from one of your characters here, which states: "You cannot tell a story without choosing, without being concerned with the form, what you have to include and leave out so the story provides a fair account of what happened." That's also why I spoke at some point of a writing style that avoids as much as possible expendable narrative elements. Some other

critics, like Ana Maria Moix have also said that. Going back and delving into the same issues is the idea of selection: to choose and to discard; what you select, what you chose and what you discard, a bit like the hindrance you mentioned; to remove the excess and avoid, reject the dispensable. This is very difficult, I think, to achieve in writing. This condensation is very difficult and, especially, it seems very difficult to know what should be chosen and what rejected, still talking on a formal level rather than about content. How do you face up to this task of selection?

L. Yes, there are two aspects: first of all, there is the selection as conversion of the story into the narrative. I think we'll have time to develop this idea. To continue with the style, I think it is essential to reflect on representation. When you are considering writing; when planning a novel, when developing a story and you're trying to convey something that needs to arrive as in its onset –as Marguerite Duras would have said- there is freshness, there is a sense of birth and almost an epiphany you have to rouse. So I think we should use the less worn materials, or as little used as possible. Materials, such as the words, that belong to everyone and that are in our everyday language, in our everyday life; and you have to use them in a way that they show their less worn or newest side. This leads to two questions, one, we might say, more obvious or easier, is that you very soon understand which parts are dispensable, how can you use a word in a sentence that is worth two or three in a former version, and the same applies to the scenes, to the moments, to the events; in short, to polish them up, to avoid merely procedural situations. Well, I think that's relatively simple. The issue becomes more complicated when we talk about something that I cited earlier, which is saturation. That unavoidably forces us to work with absences and with suggestions in representation. The upfront things, let's say the things that are too obvious, have a extremely high capacity for disaster, and that, assuming that you find something that has not been said, assuming you manage to avoid the commonplaces. So we're talking about representations that

have much to do with what is said in suggestions, with what is said, perhaps in shadows, or somehow in silhouettes rather than in solid bodies and when you get there, indeed, to watch not to spoil the suggestion and not to fall short so as to prevent it from becoming something cryptic that the reader cannot understand or cannot come across, is a complicated task. In any case, we also have many references, we have many lighthouses. These things I'm saying I believe they have always been the concern of almost any artist, but especially from the twentieth century when, I would not say competition, but rather creativity, in parallel to a world of images and a world of words, has become, with the arrival of the cinema and the audiovisual media, more patent. Hemingway's theory of the iceberg, that reflection on how nowadays things are rather told, or told more underwater, and that you have to select what will precisely emerge, is an indispensable reflection and, besides, exciting, but in which we, the creators of the 21st century, are not alone; we have many precursors, a lot of material you can learn from where you can explore and with which to dialogue.

P. Considering your work as a whole and not the novels separately, bringing together some of the recurring features, I see the constant and repeated appearance of several narrative voices, so that it enables the understanding of the different perspectives, especially in tough situations, in difficult situations, and this also leads to multiple versions of the same story. This seems significant to me not only for the formal aspect, but also because here I'm starting to step a little on the ideological and ethical area too, right? Because this implies a view of the world, it involves that there is not a sole view of the world, and for the readers, even when we have taken directly the side of one of the characters, you force us to reconsider that stance of ours. I find it interesting that choice not to admit a single possibility, and the challenge you also provoke on the readership, of having to reconsider ultimately our own existence as well; that there is not only one version, that we can be wrong and in any case we

always have to put ourselves in the others' shoes before drawing conclusions.

L. I think that this is precisely the backbone of my main concerns when it comes to writing. Undoubtedly, what we might call the story - a series of events in which a series of characters are involved- the moment when the story becomes a narration, there comes the time to select; this is, to choose. To tell a story is to opt; for a start to choose a point of view, to choose the gaze that is going to break into pieces, to splinter this huge cake that the whole story forms. This room, this place –magnificent, on the other hand- looked at from my point of view provides arguments that from your point of view are different, although they may share a texture. In that sense there is a starting position; perhaps in my stories the choice of that first point of view that will determine the story could be explained by something that Camus said, that a writer must stand not on the side of those who make history, but of those who endure it. Somehow I always have a preference to start the story from the side of those who somehow endure it, or have a territory of happiness to gain. In that sense the story for me is the possibility to win something as well. I have said on previous occasions, on many occasions, that my writing is eminently anti-deterministic. I believe that life is the possibility for one to escape from their conditions of origin in every possible way, but we could say that there is a deep revulsion in me as a person, and in me as a writer, towards the idea that someone could be definitely marked by something, especially at an early stage in their life. Naturally, this would lead us also to the field of ethics and I would also say of politics, to the field of convictions. For me it is important that there be versions of the same story, although not entailing a relativism or a moral relativism, but implying that someone adheres to something with conviction, and that different beliefs are compatible both in the field of literature and in the real world, because in the end a conviction has to do first with sincerity. I do not care so much about truth, we know it has a complex structure

and probably very choral, but I do about sincerity. I care about this area of the conviction because it is also the area of commitment. My literature is a literature of freedom and therefore is a literature of responsibility. I understand versions in this way and that's why the versions are often successive moments of someone's sincerity or someone's conviction. I believe that literature needs to explore this: as humans we can place ourselves at different points before the very same reality, and moreover, we can observe -from our own sincere convictions- the sincere convictions of others. The fact that literature is the field of that exploration seems to me -I would say that more as a reader than as a writer- almost a synonym for happiness. We read, too, to see some other sides, and I would say to be the other side of something, right?

P. I had collected some quotes precisely about freedom and happiness, and this was precisely what I was going to address now. The novels, all your novels, I reckon they talk about the freedom of choice, whatever the starting point. In an interview you gave to El País in 2005 you said: "I've always been interested in the power of humans to overcome any situation; to find solutions to personal or collective situations that seem sentenced to absolute blackness." So I think that in your work a position diametrically opposed to fatalism and channelled especially towards the possibility of achieving happiness and hope prevails. In all your novels there is a tendency to show difficult situations, perhaps the dark side of human beings, because darkness reveals precisely this ability of the characters to face suffering and to defy misfortune. I'm not going to describe your novels one by one, but there are issues such as childhood sexual abuse, disease, violence: domestic violence or violence in the context of the family, and also external violence: terrorist violence or collective violence. Why do you choose these subjects related to the darkness? Above all I think there is a strong belief on your part that whatever the initial situation, no matter how black it may be, however difficult it is to escape those episodes, sometimes

initial, sometimes very early in childhood, sometimes at older ages, that there will always be that possibility of redemption, but with much effort, with much personal hard work from the characters.

L. Of course, this is again one of the key issues. I would like to deal with it first from the formal point of view; I am a novelist, I am a storyteller, which to me has a meaning that is closely tied to what you're proposing. We often discuss, or it is usually discussed, how relevant can it be today, at this point we might say, to distinguish between genres, like poetry and narrative, and when that reflection is taken to the somewhat simplistic idea that in poetry there is a greater care over style or language; that language is addressed with a particular ambition that in the prose is dispensable, well obviously those barriers must be, naturally and necessarily, torn down, because I do not think that is the ambition of the style, the ambition of the language; let's say that the formal or structural requirements are not what will make the difference, but I do believe that there is a difference. The story, the narrative is built on a temporary basis. To narrate is to tell over time or within time, this is, to tell in motion. To depart from an initial situation and achieve, reach another situation. That is fundamental for me. In this sense I need, I want, I explore; I love the possibility for things to start moving towards their transformation, which is a possibility of the story. It is also the condition of my idea of representation of freedom and the capacity you mentioned to evade the birth marks or the imprints one gets over life and seem to determine us forever. Why depart from a dark situation? I would say for a good reason: the more difficult the starting point is, the more successful the point of arrival will be; that is, more significant or clear will be the response this character manages to give. But on the other hand, for me, exploring the darkness is not the exploration of a single darkness but of different kinds of darkness. Along my novels I have been placing that response at different times and in different historical moments, and I would say different situations

that I always place a little in the realm of the commonplace. One of the things that leaves an imprint on us, one of those marks we have to fight against are the stereotypes, the clichés. Maybe because I am a female I am particularly sensitive to that. In this sense the darkness sometimes has to do, for example, as in the case of *Side Effects*, with the disease, with the amputation of the female body, but let's say not so much, or not only, with the personal experience of someone who endures it, but with the battle against the cliché, against the idea that the female body is desirable in such or such conditions, against the idea that desire may or may not appear when the body is attacked by an illness in this or that way. In some others, as in The case of *Black Fish*, the cliché would be, we might say, a too simplistic tackling of what childhood sexual abuse may represent. This character has to fight against the imprint that someone wanted to leave on his biography, but let's say you have to fight also on what emotions and feelings can make you overcome that and not approach it from the commonplace. In the case of other novels such as *The Blind Spot* in which I have dealt with terrorist violence in the figure of one of its victims, there it was also necessary to find a way among the discourses or among certain discourses. Therefore, this darkness is related to victory. Let's say that darkness, for a start, provides measurement of the capacity of the human being to overcome it. Therefore I categorically express the happiness of achieving it, the human capacity to achieve this, my absolute confidence in this being so, and on the other hand this is connected to the exploration of what a threat may be in a certain moment. And the threat is sometimes in the actions and sometimes in the forms of representation, and I insist on this idea of the cliché. So I would say my literature is a literature against determinism but somehow also against the cliché.

P. I was thinking that this is perhaps most clear in *The Blind Spot*, precisely in the novel *The Blind Spot*, because it is a very complicated topic to deal with and the writing must have been particularly thoughtful. Not that it's not in the rest of your

novels, but here I detect a special and particular thoroughness. The release of feelings experienced by the protagonist, feelings linked to sadness, guilt, fear, but somewhat also to embarrassment and anger. We return to feelings that the characters of your novels experience: sadness guilt, fear, shame, anger. I really liked the character of Miren, the mother in *The Blind Spot* and, above all, the final watchword of the mother about the arduous conquest of happiness when he tells his son: "Let's fight every day for the happiness with all our might." And that sentence by the mother which really made me think a lot: if I smile it is precisely because my smile runs against the threat they want to burden me with. We return again to freedom and the pursuit of happiness looking maybe for new forms or original ways to fight this threat. That's why this novel avoids the cliché in a very clear way. But maybe we can go back a little to those feelings of shame or guilt that many characters experience and back to how difficult they find it to get rid of them, how they have to make a great effort, sometimes listening to others and sometimes listening to themselves, as if fighting the battle that will allow them to move towards that possible happiness.

L. Well, this is a very complex question, we would say, because it allows you to talk about many things or open it towards many aspects. I will begin, perhaps, with the theme of the cliché. *The Blind Spot* is a novel about terrorism; it is a novel against terrorism; it is a novel that focuses on this character who is a victim as his father has been murdered by ETA. You said that this is a work in which the characteristics of my style are seen in a very particular manner and I would say that it is probably due to the fact that I had to work formally—for obvious reasons connected to the fact that I am a Basque citizen; I am Basque and I live in this society—with maximum care and deep consideration. There were two issues: the first one is the cliché, or the danger of the cliché; for me it was extremely important to use a language that had to be our day-to-day language but, at the

same time, it could not be everyday language in literary terms. And this is very difficult to achieve when the words are elsewhere; I would say that everywhere. To endow them in the book, to invest them in the text with a special life: that was a very important job. A second and fundamental task was the representation of suffering. I have often represented suffering but here I think that the dimension of the representation, the public dimension that the representation of suffering could have, seemed to me extremely important and a major responsibility. I believe that suffering, even from an aesthetic reflection as demanding as the one that art has to undertake, should never be aestheticized. We should never experience what I have in some occasions when watching certain photos or exhibitions, for example; essentially in photography, or even in the cinema: images that were beautiful and which for a moment allowed you to leave aside the fact that precisely what was producing an aesthetic emotion to you was the representation of someone who was suffering. I have been followed, even obsessed by such preoccupation in order to avoid the aesthetization of suffering in the representation, and at the same time I feel as an obligation to include an aesthetic reflection in any work that is an artistic work. I have always in mind and very present the quote by Aimé Césaire, the great writer from Martinique, recently deceased, who said: " Beware of placing yourself in the position of the spectator: a man who suffers is not a dancing bear". Suffering can never be spectacularized in such a manner that the reader in this case is placed in the position of the spectator. Therefore, in the novel there had to be something that acted as a dialogue; something which could activate the reader in this situation. The second reflection refers to the fight for happiness. I believe that Miren is conscious that this is something that she has to transmit to his son, and here also, in this novel, the versions exist: the version of the narrator is the version of this young person. Fear has placed him in a position which he rejects, denying himself but there is also the version of the mother; therefore here the presence of both versions, as always in my

literature, has a liberating will or power. And here, in addition, there is a pedagogic important element: it seemed relevant to me to see the transmission of something that has happened between two generations, and that needs to be told as times goes by (a generation and another generation and another generation) in a different manner, always in a contemporary way. Then, this idea of fighting for happiness: I would relate it in the case of this novel and in all my thought as an author and as a person, with normalcy. Happiness consists of details, says Miren, the mother in the novel, but we could all say the same. We know that happiness is made of details; we know that happiness is nothing but moments; I would say: the possibility for such a moment to arise. And the professionals of other people's unhappiness, who indeed do exist, and are many, try to put such spaces in jeopardy, in such a way that the possibility that the smell of the lindens may open for you the sudden comprehension of a moment of happiness, that this smell of the lindens does not find a space to manifest itself. And what the mother is saying to him is this: "Do not let them"—in a reply that is a monumental reply that she wants to transmit to her son—"Do not give the assassins, do not allow this victory to the professionals of your unhappiness; to the ones who want your unhappiness; do not give them such victory over you". In the details. And somehow she is also saying to him: "Observe and observe yourself; know yourself to the millimeter and you will find the energy and the nourishment to start opening your own way". And this takes us to the third part. It has been often told, and you have also mentioned it, that guilt is one of the recurring topics in my literature. Until very recently, I could have agreed or could have called it that. Now I am not so sure. I believe that my books have spoken much less of guilt than of shame, probably because my books speak always about individual responsibility. I believe that guilt is a construction that comes from the exterior; which has cultural components; which sometimes falls upon us; we could say that it seizes us because we do not find a way of responding to the cliché. Often, guilt is a structure built upon the common places of the cliché.

Shame, on the other hand, is not. I believe that shame is individual and particular; it is a questioning feeling that is born from the inside out. In this sense it seems to me that it is much closer to the notions of responsibility and freedom. Such is the reason I am interested in shame. I am intrigued by the fact that someone, independently of external speeches, or even when such external speeches might applaud what he/she has done, feels a deep dissent within him/herself; he/she feels that there is something confronting him/her; a kind of internal mirror that says to him: "Not this". Guilt can appear without corporal signs, but shame is manifested with blushing, or with an internal fire. This magma is the one that I am interested in exploring and I am writing now a novel that will be called *Of Air at Dawn* in which there is precisely an exploration of the topic of shame.

P. Changing quite a bit the topic as well as the tone: you have written about music, about sounds, about songs' lyrics and the sounds associated with music. In your work there are songs in some of your novels, and references to the sounds. Your new novel, with the title of *The Sound Tracker* is closely connected to all this. How do you see this notion of music, of sonority, in your novels and in your writing?

L. I would return to what I have initially said, that I got into literature by ear and that the ear is an extraordinary formal lighthouse for me. Then, in a general way I have already mentioned that from the 20th century, literature coexists with cinema; we coexist with images, and there has always seemed to me to be, honestly, quite simplistic this sort of distance that is created between literature and cinema and the images. There is not such distance; literature is full of images. I always say that anyone who has read Dante's Hell from a visual point of view has little left to discover, even if he/she goes to a one of those Horror Film Festivals. It does not seem to me that the fertile area of the literature and the cinema, or of the literature and other forms of artistic expression, has to develop necessarily in the field of the images. Sound is a different thing. First, because music, as

narrative, is an art of temporal succession and forces one to a composition in which harmony is a fundamental exigency. I, in truth, aspire to get to the point in which the new technologies would allow us in selected reading moments to listen to the sound of the rain, to see it. Somehow the image appears immediately, but it is much more difficult to evoke its sonority and to construct an expressiveness that is a narrative expressiveness through that sound. That is what interests me now. I am interested not, as they say, in the images—we have so very many, the sight is already so saturated—but in sound, which seems to me an area of an extraordinary freshness: how the sound, how the sonorous evocation, how the pace, how the texture that comes to us across the ear can be engines of interesting expressiveness. Then there is another question, which would be the question of an aspiration to the form. I believe that we are going to build increasingly under the water, and that more and more we are going to write and to read investigating in the parts of the iceberg that stay below, and thinking that this tip that emerges is just a point of departure or a mere support. We might say then that my aspiration would be a writing style increasingly expressive and nevertheless increasingly invisible, even abstract. That is to say, we are almost speaking of music, are we not? Yes, to speak about music; to see how something of an absolute expressiveness may be formulated in a non-figurative language. Then I believe that this area of great extraordinary expressiveness not only in the emotional realm but also in the intellectual field and even in the formation of a narrative thread, of a story, can have, for example, the form of a symphony, and at the same time the ability to do without such an evident, palpable, and fleshy figurative mode. It seems to me that this is like a challenge, an aim, like an eight-thousander for the aesthetic reflection in which I am involved. Then I believe that it is always necessary to go along with the flow; one must always be looking for new things. Anyway, if we think about music, if we think about film, I believe that music, radio, the sounds never

stop innovating, they are always growing. There is a sense of the creative possibilities of the sound that I intend to explore.

P. Well, you have given many talks and conferences in many places; have lived in different countries; you spent a semester as invited resident writer in Columbia University, in New York City. I would like to ask you about the transcultural element in your writing. How do you see your own writing? How do you define yourself as a writer? I am asking because I have noticed that some of your novels, in spite of focusing on the local, or including some local elements, talk of very universal topics, of global topics, in such a way that any person who was reading these novels, even in translation, would not miss a great part of the content, of the meaning of the work. Then, though it is not a very clear question the one that I am asking you, how do you see your writing in this universal context? How do you see literature in these new transcultural contexts of globalization in the world in which we live nowadays?

L. I feel like mentioning Lope's verse: "They take for innovations things that have been forgotten". Often, when I speak or they speak to me of the glocal, of the global or of the local, I remember this verse by Lope because this has been a reflection of literature before the concepts of the globalization were invented. It was named otherwise. What has literature always sought? The universal significance out of the singular thing; we could say out of the most extreme localization, which is an individual, a human being or a human group; to achieve something able to address, to represent, to express, to communicate with everyone. "One, one is just enough as irrefutable witness of the whole human nobility," Cernuda says. I would say that such has always been the determination of literature, that a Mexican peasant in Rulfo's work may reveal and express something that is present also inside a Japanese in the 21st century. Since we speak about Japan; I was immediately reminded of Nadine Gordimer's magnificent scene in *Catch the Life* after Fukushima's accident. The protagonist is a woman whose son has to undergo radioactive

treatment for a disease and for a few months it will be "dangerous" to get close to him. And this woman in South Africa is thinking that only the Japanese are going to be able to understand it in a particular way because they keep seeing in their children the consequences of the atomic bomb. That a woman of the 21st century thinks in South Africa that her experience is connected to the one of the Japanese is the most glocal instance that may exist, and that has been in literature since its inception. If we think about the foundation of Western literature as such, for example *The Odyssey*, there is already there a presence of the others and of the Other so absolute in this idea of a trip that is a permanent contrast, that it should have served us more as a guide, but let's say that we probably do not trust literature enough. And if we think, alluding to another non-Western tradition, about the stories of the *Panchatantra*, this idea of the travelling stories with their ability to be born in Damascus and to have meaning in London; this is also the most glocal that we can find, and it has been part of literature for millennia. I would say that this is a fundamental reflection on which I insist. I have sometimes a maximum resistance to applaud certain ideas which circumscribe literature with an adjective that confines it to a place, because also as readers we have read in so many places and so soon that, really, to place ourselves inside some form of enclosure, inside a more or less delimited enclosure, seems to me, other than scarcely enticing, almost impossible to my imagination. My imagination resists that. Nevertheless, probably the interesting thing is to examine how this singularity that aspires to universality is represented. For me literature is the art of reply. I am—this said with a sense of humour—a replicant by nature and I usually introduce, at times with inconvenient easiness, a reply or an interrogation in almost everything that happens to me. In what sense am I a replicant? I have lived in different places, as you said, but in a certain moment I decided to settle here, in the place where I was born; then, when I felt that this place in which I live had a tendency to shut itself off, to get engrossed in itself, I have

brought the exterior herein; my literature has brought the exterior herein. I have set my books in other places writing here as a way of provoking, of opening a dialogue with the outside. When speaking about another matter, referring to multiperspectivism, Henry James said that the house of fiction has many windows. I have put windows; I wanted my books to be windows that could connect with the exterior when I felt that the interior was too enclosed. When this interior has been opened, sometimes due to our political life—fortunately our situation has been opened and has become more luminous—but especially due to the new technologies, the capacity of communication today makes it almost ridiculous to speak about borders since I can be reading a newspaper or chatting with someone who can be at the other end of the world. When these windows or these large windows have appeared in a most natural way I have been interested in exploring the inside. I have started setting my books here, placing my books here as a way of portraying to the outside what is happening here, what has been happening here in a particular way these years with terrorist violence. I decide to focus on the inside when the outside is more accessible and to focus on the outside when the inside exercises a pressure, in my opinion, too insistent.

P. Well, we are getting to the end: in this city in which you live and in which you were born, your participation in the cultural life of the city is very intense and I know that it takes a lot of time and a lot of energy from you. I wanted to see if you still have time for new projects, for new books; what can we expect?

L. I have said from the beginning that I devote a lot of time to this literary reflection; I constantly live with ideas of novels and formal proposals. In an intentional, deliberate and meticulous way, I have been sowing projects here and there, in my life, in my notebooks, in my computer. In other cases the sowing has been done as in nature, because there has been a gust of wind that has taken the seed to a site and I did not know it, and suddenly I have realized that this seed had started growing; all that to say

that I believe I am in a moment in which I see crops on which to work. The sowing period has been a long one and now I notice that there are projects that I can harvest; I want to say that I have many books in my head. I will indicate two: I am very focused on a project that is going to be called *Wayfarers on Ice*, which as its name indicates, has to do with walking; not with the idea of pilgrimage, but rather with the notion of movement, of pace, at the scale of the human thing. I am also in the project that I told you about a little while ago, which is called *Of Air at Dawn*, which is an exploration of shame and which is going to address a topic that concerns us in a particular way in the Basque Country, and then I have—well, there are other projects, but I am not going to disclose everything because they still are in a preliminary phase—but I have two essay projects. Two essays that I am going to write, that are already mature, one on the representation of violence against women in a series of European female writers of the 20th and 21st century in which I am going to include the work of a Latin-American author, a Colombian, Evelio Rosero, that seems to me to be fundamental in this sense. I am already with this advanced project and then, because I have been directing a workshop of creative writing for many years, I wanted to write a sort of manual, or, rather than a manual, a book that could accompany young writers as a guide on the things about which we have been thinking throughout the years, but I couldn't find the way, I did not like the ones I found. There are many manuals, many books on it, but they were not the one that I wanted to write and a good day I found the formula, which is possible that may even have a continuity, which could spread to other authors—already I have the ideas for volumes 2, 3 and 4—. It is going to be called *Instructions for the Perfect Short Story* (in which there will be reflections on narrative conventions, etc.) or *A Passionate Reading of Ignacio Aldecoa*; that is to say, it is going to be a critical analysis of Ignacio Aldecoa's short stories, which are so wonderful that they justify this admiring title but including a pedagogic aspect addressed to people who want to write. Therefore, this book of Instructions for the *Perfect Short*

*Story or a Passionate Reading of Ignacio Aldecoa* is going to be one of the projects that I expect to complete; I don't know if by the end of the year I will have managed to end the book, but I will try because I am really filled with enthusiasm.

P. Very enthusiastically are we waiting with longing and desire to see what comes from your creative voice as well as from your critical essay writing. There is no doubt that in any case they will be rich and illuminating works that will serve us to end up by being better persons, which is the best thing that can be achieved by a writer, so thank you very much and we look forward to your upcoming works.

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