

Translations of Fernando Aramburu's "Los peces de la amargura" ("Fish of Bitterness") and  
"Maritxu"

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

TRANSLATIONS OF FERNANDO ARAMBURU’S “LOS PECES DE LA AMARGURA”  
 (“FISH OF BITTERNESS”) AND “MARITXU”

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The short stories “Los peces de la amargura” and “Maritxu” by Spanish author Fernando Aramburu explore terrorism in the Basque Country, the effects of which are life-altering and ever-present long after the initial event leaves the news cycle. Despite the stories’ complexity and continuous relevancy in the global political landscape, neither story has been translated from Spanish into English. This thesis investigates and produces an English translation of both stories (respectively deemed “Fish of Bitterness” and “Maritxu”) with the goal of creating a *faithful* representation of the original stories’ portrayal of colloquialisms, narrative techniques, and Basque as a minority language. Research of Basque and Spanish history, creative writing theory, translation theory, and translations methods were synthesized both to establish this goal and to realize it; resulting in a new iteration of Aramburu’s texts that introduces the topic of terrorism in the Basque Country to a new English-speaking audience.

Signature of Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ **Jadon Barnett** \_\_\_\_\_

Date 07/22/2023

## **Contents**

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	3
“Fish of Bitterness”.....	10
“Maritxu”.....	27
Basque Glossary.....	39
Creative Reflection & Discussion.....	40
Conclusions.....	58
Works Cited.....	59

## Introduction

The history of a culture lies not only in its textbooks and its artifacts but also in its literature. Stories both fiction and nonfiction exhibit the ideas that inhabit a culture and allow people from other cultures to discover that culture, consider new perspectives, and walk away from the text carrying these ideas with them. The joyous learning opportunities that stories offer can just as easily reveal the tragedies of humanity to the reader. However, it is often necessary to witness these tragedies in order to understand a culture—what events and circumstances drive a person to commit great atrocities against others. In the short stories “Los peces de la amargura” and “Maritxu,”<sup>1</sup> Spanish author Fernando Aramburu explores the tragedy of terrorism that lingers in the lives of communities long after the act, a topic that is overlooked in society. Equally important is Aramburu’s portrayal of the Basque language and its speakers,<sup>2</sup> as it presents complex characters that both embody and defy stereotypes. However, these stories are only available in Spanish and deserve to be read by a larger global audience. Through my research and the process and product of my translation, I answer well the following question: How can one translate “Los peces de la amargura” and “Maritxu” by Fernando Aramburu in a way that is faithful and introduces English-speaking audiences to the Basque language and culture?

My translation serves as a creative project that combines research, theory, and translation techniques to produce a new work of literature. To capture the poetic nuance of language, it is necessary to develop a translation that is *faithful* (a concept I explore in the literature review).

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<sup>1</sup> All Spanish titles that appear in this thesis align with the capitalization conventions of the Spanish language.

<sup>2</sup> The Basque are a once-repressed community in Spain that have also become associated with terrorism in support of its nationalist and separatist movements.

Translating a story that hasn't been translated yet is important for several reasons. First, it grants access to readers who do not speak the story's original language. Literature is a reflection of different cultures, societies, and ideas. Through translation, we open up a part of our world and make it accessible to a new and wider audience. Furthermore, translating a story can also help to enrich the literary canon of a language, exposing readers to new styles, themes, and ideas. Aramburu's prose is experimental yet poetic. The characters' thoughts often blend together with dialogue and narration in such a way that forces the reader to question who is truly unreliable: the characters or the narrator. His is a unique style that I hope to preserve in my translation for English-speaking readers to experience. Lastly, translating a story that has not been translated yet can help preserve and promote the cultural heritage of a particular region or community, in this case Basque communities. By sharing stories that were previously unavailable to non-speakers, we are celebrating diversity and promoting cross-cultural understanding.

## Literature Review

My research has required a mixed-methods approach in order to thoroughly answer my research question. The translation is a method in itself. To borrow from a methodology of creative writing, Jon Cook describes writing as a process of discovery: a thorough writing project involves the “necessity of rewriting” and “calls for a practice of writing informed by extensive reading” (204). Translation meets these criteria since it involves research beyond the text itself and multiple iterations of rewrites in order to reach a discovery. I have also employed textual analysis of the short stories themselves so that my translation is based on a profound understanding of the source text. Such a profound understanding necessitates an understanding of the history of the Basque Country as well as extant theories of literary translation.

### The Basque Country

The Basque people and language have a unique and fascinating history that spans thousands of years. The Basque people are an indigenous ethnic group that live in a region straddling the border of France and Spain, along the Bay of Biscay. The Basque language, also known as Euskara, is one of the oldest languages in Europe, with no clear relation to any other known language in the world. The Basque people have a rich and complex cultural heritage, which has been shaped by a history of political and linguistic oppression. For centuries, the Basque people have fought to preserve their language and culture, and have faced persecution and discrimination for doing so. Most recently, the regime of Spanish dictator Francisco Franco demanded their assimilation during the Spanish Civil War. The regime stigmatized the use of the Basque language to suppress their desire for separatism from Spain (Molina 289). The regime also bombed the small Basque town of Guernica, also known as Gernika, prompting the mass evacuation of children to other countries and inspiring Picasso’s painting of the same name (*The*

*Bombing of Gernika*). Despite this, the Basque language and culture have survived, and in recent years, there has been a resurgence of Basque pride and identity, though not without consequences.

ETA, which stands for Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (*Basque Homeland and Freedom in Basque*), was a separatist group and terrorist organization that operated in the Basque region of Spain and France from 1959 to 2018. ETA arose as a direct and violent response to the oppression of Franco's dictatorship (Whitfield 1). The group's goal was to achieve an independent Basque state, which would comprise territories currently located in northern Spain and southwestern France. ETA's campaign of violence included bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings, which claimed the lives of over 800 people during the group's existence (Woodworth 1). ETA's violence was widely condemned, both within Spain and internationally, and led to the group being classified as a terrorist organization by many countries. Despite ETA's violent tactics, the separatist movement in the Basque region remained strong, and many Basque people continued to support the group's goal of an independent state. In recent years, however, the movement has shifted towards more peaceful means of achieving autonomy, and ETA announced its dissolution in 2018 (Minder). The legacy of ETA's violence and the Basque separatist movement remains a contentious issue in Spain and France today.

#### The Source Texts

Aramburu, born in the Basque city of San Sebastian (*Donostia* is its Basque name), explores the lasting effects of ETA's terrorism in the Basque Country through his short stories compiled in *Los peces de la amargura* (*Fish of Bitterness*). The titular story is told through the mind of a father whose daughter has lost a leg in a bombing. The plot focuses on the daughter's release from the hospital and her adjustment to her new life with a physical disability. The story



very well captures the trauma that the family has suffered as innocent bystanders of the attack (Alonso-Rey 4). Such trauma's lack of attention and exposure in society and in the media is reflected by the daughter's quiet suffering and relegation as a side character in her own story. In "Maritxu," conversely, the titular character is the mother of a young man sentenced to nearly thirty years in prison for participating in an ETA bombing. She maintains her love for her son despite his guilt, traveling hours by bus to visit him in Madrid while she notes how her local community has warped in the aftermath of the bombing. Maritxu embodies ambivalent feelings toward nationalist terrorism as early as the opening scene of the story, in which she says sternly, in the same manner that a mother scolds her son, that it is okay to kill authority figures but not children (Rivas-Hernández 5). These conflicting viewpoints highlight the complex moral and emotional dilemma that has emerged from the desire to preserve the Basque Country's heritage and national identity.

Another notable feature of "Los peces de la amargura" and "Maritxu" is that the characters use Basque words as well as *basqueisms* in their Spanish. For example, the Basque word for one's mother, *ama*, is presented as endearing alongside a shortening of the Spanish word *adelante* ("alante" as a basqueism, *forward* in English) which is portrayed as an implication of a lower education. In my translation, I have preserved as much usage of Basque as possible. I explain Basque words in footnotes and catalog them in a glossary following the translation. Some colloquialisms have been lost in translation, however, due to the unstable nature of language (for example, Gregory Rabassa, the translator of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, claims to have had great trouble in translating just the title of the novel due to the different conventions of indefinite articles between English and Spanish

[Rabassa 95]). However, there have been numerous opportunities to introduce equivalencies that would make sense to an English speaker.

### The Translation

Literary translation theories refer to the various approaches and methodologies used by translators to convey the meaning and style of a literary work from one language to another. There are several different theories of literary translation, each with its own set of principles and priorities. Some theories emphasize the importance of preserving the literal meaning of the source text, while others prioritize capturing the author's voice or style. Other theories focus on the cultural context of the original work and the target audience, and aim to make the translation accessible and relevant to readers from a different linguistic and cultural background, although Walter Benjamin writes that it is problematic to assume that there exists an *ideal audience* that one should strive to write for (89). Some of the most prominent literary translation theories discuss formal equivalence, which prioritizes accuracy and fidelity to the original text, and dynamic equivalence, which seeks to recreate the effect of the original text on the reader, even if it means departing from the literal meaning. For example, George Steiner writes of situations in which “there is nothing there” behind a text, that the aesthetic experience of the words carries far more importance than what the words should mean (186). Ultimately, the selection of translation theories that inform a translation depends on a variety of factors, including the type of literary work being translated, the intended audience, and the translator's personal philosophy and approach.

Since there is such a variety of theories of how to properly approach a translation, it is a challenge to narrow exactly what makes a translation *faithful*, especially when a text is to be interpreted and reinterpreted by the readers and by the translator who is tasked with

reconstructing the work in another language, “to find the intention toward the language into which the work is to be translated” (Benjamin 93). I hypothesize that a faithful translation will meet these criteria based on the ideas of named theorists and my personal philosophy of language exposure and preservation:

- I. The translation approaches a similar, but not exact, dimension of interpretations and aesthetic experiences as Aramburu’s original text.
- II. The translation is “informed”: it is constructed through extensive reading and research (Cook), and characterized by top-down processing and “a keen awareness of the genre conventions of the text” (Baer and Mellinger 4).
- III. The translation is *relevant*: it is “appropriate,” “justified,” elevating, important, and exhibits a wordsmithing that is unrepeatable in other languages (Derrida 376, 390). I plan to meet this criterion additionally through the preservation of Basque words that is representative of both Aramburu’s source text and what I myself have experienced while living in San Sebastian.

To meet these criteria and build a faithful translation, I utilize a variety of translation techniques. Jiménez-Jiménez divides translation techniques into four categories: techniques of equality, of substitution, of addition, and of omission (94–95). The variety of these techniques accounts for the variety of semantic and pragmatic situations that are featured in the text’s informal dialogues, which house many idioms and slang. Additionally, Since Aramburu’s stories are “translingual,” dealing with two languages at once, it is also important to recognize the historical and current power balance between Basque as a minority language and Spanish as a majority language and to inform my translation with this knowledge (Van Dyck 466). All of these ideas have influenced

my decisions throughout my translation and my subsequent discussion of the most notable scenarios in translingual thought.

### Limitations

Research via translation does not come without some limitations. One such limitation is that my translation is only one translation. A translation, like its source text, is fixed in time, and it reveals how our perceptions of a text change over time (Benjamin 90). It is just one possible iteration of that text and it is influenced heavily by my perspectives, techniques, and decisions as a translator. Another translator may handle this text with a different approach and yield results that differ from mine quite drastically, just as translations of the *One Thousand and One Nights* edit and even omit certain tales (Borges 122–135; Buchan). As a result, the findings of my research will not necessarily be reproducible but instead a unique possibility.

Another limitation of my translation is that my knowledge of the Basque language is elementary. I have learned enough grammar and vocabulary to sufficiently address the Basque words that appear in the following two stories. However, my base of knowledge and experiences differ from that of an intermediate, advanced, or native Basque speaker. This means that I may not have access to relevant information contained in Basque articles and other texts.

Additionally, while I am familiar with the Basque words in the text and the contexts in which they are used, a translator with Basque fluency who has grown up in the culture—or who holds a different perspective on the political environment in the Basque Country—would most certainly address the characters and events in the short stories from a different angle.

Despite the limitations, realizing my thesis as a creative project is a primary application of the theory and of the skills that I have developed at Millersville University. Creating a translation heavily informed by research is not only a contribution, however minor, to our body

of literary works, but also evidence of my mastery of the English and Spanish languages. Most importantly, though, a translation “repeatedly reaffirms” the importance of the source text (Briggs 42). The importance of Aramburu’s stories and the history of the Basque people deserves to be recognized and reaffirmed through a second life in front of an English-speaking audience.

**Fish of Bitterness**  
**Fernando Aramburu**  
Translated by Jadon Barnett

Andoni and I went to look for her at midmorning. It was near the end of last November. That day couldn't have been more unpleasant. One of those gray, rainy days when gusts of wind blow at you from every direction. On a day like that it's better to stay home unless running an errand gets you out of the house. Before I said goodbye, I told my Juani that bad luck follows our daughter everywhere she goes. Juani, in bed with a migraine, replied that bad luck and much worse things followed her too. It irritated Juani that she couldn't come with me. Okay, okay, don't get so worked up over this, I said. Migraines pass; on the other hand, what our daughter has can't be cured. We stopped talking because Andoni was waiting for me downstairs. We wanted to save our daughter from the pain of a bumpy ride. That's why we went in Andoni's car, which was more comfortable than mine. I really liked Andoni. A quiet, formal, hardworking guy. Any compliment you give him won't do justice to how great he is. When we were stopped at a red light on the way to the hospital, he suddenly said to me: Jesús, I'm keeping my marriage promise. I looked at him without saying anything. He did the same. I don't know why we looked at each other. I couldn't keep holding my gaze after a few seconds, so I turned back to the side window. The wind was bending the tips of the trees, their leaves flowing from side to side. It hadn't stopped raining since the night before. We made the rest of the trip in silence. Sad.

We didn't find her in the room. My heart skipped a beat. That's just how I am. The fear went away immediately. And since it did, let's not talk about it anymore. In the place where my daughter had been suffering for six months, not counting the days in intensive care, there was now another bed with another patient. We went to ask. They told us to wait at the end of the hall, that they were going to bring her to us. After a while we saw her appear in the background, sitting in a wheelchair. My daughter. She was carrying a bouquet of white roses on her lap. People came out of some rooms to tell her goodbye. Pushing her in the wheelchair was the nurse she had made great

friends with. Another nurse came by her side, hauling the bags, the overnight bag, and the crutches. Andoni rushed to carry all the luggage himself. I heard my daughter tell him to be careful not to let anything fall on the floor. That was the moment when I closed in to kiss her. Ama?<sup>3</sup> she asked. I noticed more bone in her cheeks than meat. Andoni and I stood behind our daughter and the nurses to not cut off their conversation. Since we didn't all fit in the elevator, he and I went down the stairs. Even then, we were the first ones to reach the ground floor. That's when I realized that each one of us would have to get used to the slowness from here on out. My daughter asked me to take the roses. The nurses directed Andoni to bring the car around to an entrance reserved for the healthcare staff. It wasn't wise to walk with my daughter through the middle of the crowd that usually gathers in front of the main entrance. For the first time in a long time I saw my daughter stand up. My daughter, standing up. It's a tragedy when you have to be amazed by something like that. And yet, it seemed to me like I was witnessing a miracle. My daughter supported herself on the crutches. I felt a sharp pain inside when I saw how fragile she was, her thin, powerless hands. My daughter, the only one I have. Motionless, she let herself be kissed by the two nurses. Till next time, she said to them in a tone that suddenly cut through their smiles. What was she going to say if sooner or later she had to return to have the pins removed from her leg? Andoni committed the indecency of reminding the three women, all three on the verge of tears, that it was raining. What a great guy. Just as great as he was big, and as big as he was clumsy. My daughter refused his arm the moment she was about to sit in the back of the car. When she couldn't get in, she asked me to help her. We were already on the road down to the city when the rain started lashing hard against the windshield. My daughter protested: Slow down. I looked at the speedometer. We were going forty kilometers per hour. Forty and downhill. Andoni slowed down obediently. At the same time, a city bus came up behind us. The driver made an abrupt maneuver to overtake us. As he passed by our side, he made an offensive gesture. I didn't see it, but Andoni did. Sad.

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<sup>3</sup> ama - Basque word for mother

To the sea. She wanted to go to the sea. She had dreamt of seeing the sea for several months. She didn't care if it was raining. Others make a promise to God or go on a pilgrimage to Santiago. She had got it into her head that if one day she managed to get out of the hospital she would go straight to see the sea. Andoni looked at me as if begging me to intervene. I asked: Wouldn't you rather go home first to get an umbrella and a raincoat and see ama? She's waiting for you. After a while of silence, she simply said that she didn't need more than five minutes to satisfy the craving. We found the promenade deserted. Makes sense. Who could think of walking in that place so exposed to the elements, with that kind of weather and the swell that raised a spray of foam up to the road every five minutes? She tried to open the door and couldn't. Aita,<sup>4</sup> she said. I played deaf so that her boyfriend would help her. It was raining less, but it was still raining. She intended to go to the railing by herself. Andoni and I said no. She agreed to let us accompany her on the condition that we would then leave her side. She still lacked practice with the crutches. We asked her if she didn't think it was better to sit on the bench, where she had the same view as she did standing. The bench was wet. Andoni brought her a blanket. She sat on top. At last she was alone in front of the sea. Inside the car, about ten meters away, we waited for her to call for us. Salt damages the car. Yeah, I said, and I shut up. Five minutes passed. More passed. Andoni began to get impatient. The only thing left was for her to catch pneumonia. Jesús, what a mess Juani is going to make when she finds out. My daughter was wearing a knotted scarf around her neck. One end of it fell on her back. Sometimes a gust of wind would blow and the end would flutter. On top of this, my daughter turned her face a little to talk to us. Andoni rolled down the window. The roses. She wanted us to bring her the rose bouquet. We took it to her. With our help she made her way to the railing. The whole sea was ashen and white and cluttered with crashing waves. The sky was a clump of dirty clouds. One by one she tossed the roses to the bottom of the cliff. Her hair and her clothes were soaked with rain and the spray of the waves. And after a while, we were the same. When

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<sup>4</sup> aita - Basque word for father



she had thrown the whole bouquet, she took a deep breath. Yeah, she said, we can go home now. Sad.

She insisted on going up the stairs alone. Andoni went up behind her, a step behind just in case. Thankfully we live on the second floor and not any higher. Her left leg was able to be treated; however, her right leg will never be able to support her as it should, neither will it bend at the knee. It hangs, that's it. She used to hold a grudge against the doctors for not amputating it. What good is there, she would say, in having a useless limb that also never stops hurting? One afternoon Juani and I arrived at the hospital and we caught her in bed writing. That was after they stopped having her legs hang from a crane. My daughter. Now she could get up; now she exercised a bit with the crutches. What are you writing, poems? She would put up with my jokes. She won't tolerate anyone else's. But I'm her aita and she knows that inside her aita there's no room for bad intentions. She replied that she was writing a list of the things she couldn't do. I saw she had the page full. She started reading it: Working outside the house, going back to aerobics classes, bike riding... Okay, okay, Juani cut in, we didn't come here to be depressed. I recognize that yes, I am prone to discouragement. My Juani is more collected. She thrives on problems, she gets angry, she makes life a little bit harder for us all, but she keeps moving forward. I don't take it badly. If she wants to scream, let her scream. Because the truth is that without Juani and without her energy and strength we would be much worse off. When we entered the house, she peeked through the door in her nightgown. You could see in the dark circles under her eyes and the wrinkles on her forehead that the migraine was hitting her hard that day. Our daughter told her to go to bed, that there would be time for kisses later. Juani asked her with her eyes closed if she was in pain. Also with her eyes closed she waited for her response. My Juani talks with her eyes closed when she feels really bad. The moment she was about to retire, she raised her eyelids a little. Just enough to realize that our daughter was coming in wet. Andoni started to stammer out an explanation. I gestured toward him to shut up. Sad.

Nothing lit up our daughter's face with joy more than entering her bedroom. We had left everything just as it was the day that she left to take money out of her savings account and never came back. She was happy to reunite with her personal belongings. She named a few of them from the doorway, savoring the words. My slippers, she said in the exact same tone you use to talk to yourself. My striped quilt. My mirror. My computer. And every time she named an object, it felt to me as if there were a trembling in the air. She walked in, and we went in single file behind her. We were adjusting to the slowness. With uncertain steps she headed for the wardrobe. Juani opened the doors for her. Our daughter handed me a crutch. That way she had an open hand to move through her jackets, her blouses, her shoes spread out on the shelves. She was looking at herself in the mirror. She didn't look at her leg. I fixated on that. She looked at her smiling face. She winked an eye and stuck out her tongue. Next she found a novel on her desk. A pocket calendar marked the last page read more than six months back. She likewise found some dried-up flowers inside a waterless vase, once gifted by Andoni. To my Juani, meanwhile, it seemed like the time had come to get dry clothes out of the closet. At once the two women began to argue. Andoni and I split into the kitchen. I liked Andoni as a son-in-law for his calmness. I remember when we bought the sofa. He brought it up himself from the street. The piece of junk just barely fit through the opening of the stairwell. Later, I tried to move it when no one was watching. I barely managed to get it a few centimeters off the ground. It seemed inconceivable to me that someone could have so much strength. I feared for my daughter. And yet she handled the big guy like a lamb. Do this, do that. Stand up, sit down. Just like that all the time. And the big guy, he's happy. It must be that the relationship is much easier when one orders and the other obeys. Juani and our daughter have a lot of character. For them there's no difference between talking and arguing. They argue even when they agree. And it's not that they don't get along in the sense that they don't love each other. They love each other to death. But they have that authoritarian drive that prevents them from giving in. I didn't have to give Andoni a signal. When the two started to contradict each other,

we got out of the bedroom. We sat at the kitchen table and had a coffee. Jesús, he asked me, when do you think we'll be able to get married? I told him: It's gonna be difficult. A while later he asked me if I usually have coffee with a lot or a little sugar. I have it with enough. He does too. That's all we talked about. Sad.

I spent the afternoon in the dining room cleaning the aquarium filter, filling out crosswords and word searches; ultimately, killing time as I always have since I retired. On País Vasco<sup>5</sup> they replayed the pelota game<sup>6</sup> from the day before. I saw it again, but with the sound off so it wouldn't be annoying. The wind blew through the street more strongly than in the morning. Sometimes spurts of rain rattled against the glass. It was so dark outside that I had to turn on the lamp before four o'clock. We used to dream about our daughter's return for a long time. The dream had finally come true. You would think we'd all be jumping for joy. However, the apartment was still as quiet as it had been for half a year. Maybe when Juani recovers we could celebrate the event. But we would have to do something together in the morning so that Andoni could also be there. Andoni had a late afternoon shift that week. He had no choice but to leave a little after noon. I accompanied him to the door. He was so tall that he had to bend down to avoid hitting his forehead on the lintel. Okay, Jesús, he said with dry air from the landing. He looked at me like he was waiting for me to add something. Agur,<sup>7</sup> Andoni. Nothing else came to me. I closed the door. Maybe he thought that I was shutting it in his face, but I had a pan on the fire. My Juani didn't eat. As soon as she saw our daughter with dry clothes, she went back to bed. Our daughter went to bed at two. She hardly tasted the food. She was sitting there and I was sitting here. She was dipping the edge of her spoon in the soup. She took it out just to wet the tip of her tongue. You slurp like a horse, she berated me. In the end she pushed her plate, nearly full, off to the side and ate three or four grapes without any appetite. She insisted on washing the dishes. There weren't many. I tried to dissuade her. Do you think I'm useless or

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<sup>5</sup> a popular television program in the region

<sup>6</sup> Basque pelota - a traditional ball game played with a wall and rackets

<sup>7</sup> agur- a Basque valediction

something? Alright, alright. She brought a stool over to the sink. My daughter sat down with my help. I didn't leave her side while she washed the little that there was to wash. See? I can do it. The foam from the detergent covered her thin hands. The hospital needles had left purple marks on both her forearms. I helped her get down off the stool. She took a painkiller, picked up her crutches, and left the kitchen saying that she was going to her room to listen to music and be alone. That last one I understood really well. In the afternoon, the phone rang four or five times. Friends and relatives. Asking how she's doing. Good, but I can't put her on. My sister-in-law touched on the subject of starting a new life. I hurried to give her a reason to shut up. Andoni called too, but late, when we were eating dinner. Our daughter quietly asked me to tell him that she hadn't gotten up yet. I told the lie and hung up. Juani disapproved of such an unkind way to treat a boyfriend. Ama, stay out of this. Juani's head hurt too much to get tangled in that debate. She kept quiet and made peace. I made them pisto for dinner. The one said: How many times have I asked you to cut the peppers in smaller pieces? or do you think my mouth is a bottomless pit? The other: Leave aita alone, he does what he can. A little later, my protector: You forgot the salt, right? This doesn't taste like anything. Juani: Why don't you leave him alone now? And our daughter: I'm not telling him like a critic. I'm telling him so he remembers next time. On one of them, I played my trump card. I instantly regretted it. I told them in good faith, to reconcile them: I like your discord, it's a sign that you both feel better. Our daughter replied that no one would count on her to form a happy home. Her words left me stunned. I couldn't stop thinking about it all night. Generally, when Juani goes to bed, I'm already asleep. It's rare when I feel her get in. That time I caught myself staring at the ceiling. What are you thinking about? Nothing. She turned off the light. She couldn't sleep either. Does your head still hurt? A little. A while later, in the darkness, she said: tread carefully if you don't want to lose it. Sad.

One night, our daughter woke us up. There was a week and a half left before the newspapers would describe her as a twenty-nine year old woman

that was walking casually near the site of the explosion. It was three or four o'clock, I'm not sure. In reality, it was Juani who nudged me awake. I didn't feel our daughter come in, nor did I hear that she started to talk to us with her head poking into the doorway. Light entered from the hall. Jesús, she says she's getting married. I asked, half asleep, with who. Juani anticipated our daughter's response. With the big guy, who else? His name is Andoni, corrected my daughter from the door. She looked cheerful. Those were different times. I think about the past year as if it were part of an ancient era. At least, I've gotten much older in the last six months or so. The guy had come to the house a couple of times. We thought he must be a friend from her group, maybe a coworker. They wouldn't kiss or hold hands in front of us. I remember the first time I spoke to him. He saw me in the living room, with the aquarium lid raised. I shook his hand. A hand, without exaggerating, twice as big as mine. Feeding the fish, eh? Well yeah. He stood there a while watching them without saying anything. Suddenly he stood upright and said: Pretty. From that moment he seemed nice. So to me it seemed fine that my daughter wanted to marry him. Andoni had a good job, he dressed and acted with decency, he was paying installments on a home, and on top of that he had said liked my fish. To me, the perfect son-in-law, and to Juani too. What's happening is that she is the way she is, nosey and argumentative, and she has to have the last word, whatever they're talking about. She sent our daughter to bed. It was clear she didn't believe her. Tomorrow we'll talk. I'm getting married, ama. I haven't been drinking. Right, right, you must have been up all night hitting the holy water. I butted in: Congratulations. Juani rolled over in bed. With a tug of the blanket she left me, as they say, out in the open. You be quiet. Gracias, aita. That was the last thing our daughter said before closing the door. The room was once again filled with darkness. Juani mocked me: Congratulations, congratulations. Do you think you just won a raffle or something? If only she knew what it's like to be married! Sad.

Since my daughter returned, I was dedicating more time to the fish. I had basically abandoned them while she was admitted into the hospital. One of those days, I got up in the morning and found six or seven dead. Even the

janitor fish, which once had been my most prized possession. Now I had regained my interest in the fish and started changing their water often. I pulled out all the plants covered in black algae, put in new ones, bought a janitor fish similar to the old one and poured into the water a liquid that they recommended to me at the pet store. The activity entertained me, but above all, it was a way to get myself out of the middle of those two. Like how you see someone who's busy and leave them alone. Furthermore, nobody objected to the aquarium. Out of all the visitors who passed through their dining room, there were only a few who didn't pay the fish a compliment. My Juani enjoys sitting next to the aquarium. From what I can see, the proximity to the fish and aquatic plants relaxes her. And since the fluorescent tubes inside give off a clear light that doesn't hurt your eyes, she often sits there with her thread and needles. One of those rainy afternoons at the end of autumn, I was testing out a gadget to clean the glass on the inside. The janitor fish does its part, but that's not enough. Suddenly I heard noises coming from the bathroom. They sounded like broken bottles being smashed against a tile floor. I realized right away that it was intentional. But that didn't stop me from being alarmed. Juani had gone to the fish market. We had a secret agreement to never leave our daughter home alone. I knocked on the door. The noises ceased immediately. I asked her if something happened. Come in, she said. It had been many years, when she was little, since I last saw her naked. Scattered all around her were pieces of broken glass mixed with all kinds of liquids and viscous substances. There were also plastic containers, intact. I felt in my nose a strong scent of hygiene products. I recognized my shaving cream in the middle of the wreckage. Don't cut yourself, I told her. She was barefoot, held up by her crutches. Her face revealed her irritation. With a brisk turn of the chin she pointed toward the bathtub. She had filled it halfway. A faint steam was rising from the water. It seemed weird to me that she tried to take a bath without her mother home. What's more, she had had her rehabilitation session in the morning and I know that they would always give you a shower before sending you on your way. Aita, help me into the water and clean this. It wasn't a strict order. It was a gentle plea wrapped in a

harsh voice. She angrily threw the crutches to the ground before wrapping her arms around my neck. I lifted her up with care. She didn't weigh much. I guided her into the water. I brought the brush, the dustpan, and a plastic bag from the kitchen. While I was cleaning the floor I avoided looking at my daughter. I don't know, I felt embarrassed. She berated me about it. Why won't you look at me? I looked at her, but I didn't see her. She was in front of me, in the bathtub, with the water up to her waist, and yet, I had the feeling that I could see the tiles on the wall right through her body. Aita, you're too good. I shrugged. What was I supposed to say? When I finished cleaning I went back to my fish. A long while afterward she called to me. I got her out of the bathtub. Then I had to dry her off. I dried her off without any fussiness or shame, from top to bottom like she wanted. From what I could tell, her hair was still wet when Juani came home. The dining room door was open. I heard her complain: Don't tell me you took another shower. By yourself? It stinks of perfume even at the front door. And throwing the blame on me: He must have filled the tub for you with bath salts. Sad.

We tried it three times. The idea seemed ridiculous to me from the start; but since it had come from Juani, it had to be carried out. The last time was the Sunday before Christmas. We were finishing our meal. The table was set. We were about to eat a dozen cakes. They were Andoni's gift to celebrate his recent birthday. During the week he had turned thirty-two. While she was serving the coffee, Juani asked them if they were thinking about going out. Andoni looked at our daughter and our daughter was being lazy and rather wanted to stay home. What about my leg, what if the weather's bad. A riff raff began in between the two women. Here you're going to rust like an old tool. That's what I am, ama. I intervened with the first idea that came to mind. Why don't you go to the movies? Andoni's face brightened up. They were having a good laugh, he said. They couldn't reach an agreement and so I went to bed. When I got up from my siesta I learned that my daughter had changed her mind. The couple would be back at nine. At eight forty, Juani rushed me to change my clothes. We went out. While we were going down the stairs I asked her where to. You'll know soon enough. I wasn't satisfied.

She answered that she had left a note on the table so that our daughter wouldn't be worried. As soon as I stepped out onto the street I had to grab my beret. A strong wind was blowing. Juani's umbrella folded inside out and she had to close it. It had gotten dark. By the light of the street lamps, the raindrops were falling like bullets, sometimes almost horizontally. Few people were walking on the sidewalks. Near our front door there's a cafeteria, but it closes Sunday afternoons. Jesús, we'll have to look for a hiding spot. You're going to explain why you made me leave the house right now or I'm going home. I'm serious. We're not going back before ten, so shut up and follow me. We took shelter on the porch that's next to the pharmacy. As the place was on the corner, there was a strong current. The cold slipped right through our clothing. The only benefit was that we were safe from the rain. I'm gonna miss the pelota game. Juani wasn't listening. She stuck her head between the columns once in a while in order to look in the direction of our front door. Past nine, we saw them coming home. Andoni got out of the car, walked around to the other side, and helped our daughter exit. He made a sort of roof with his raincoat so that she wouldn't get wet. Attentive man, that Andoni. With her crutches and her mobility issues, our daughter disappeared into the doorway. A while later the window to her room lit up. It was then that my gaze and Juani's found each other. I didn't want to ask her. Why would I? The expression on her face was clear enough. We agreed that our daughter shouldn't stay home alone. In case she couldn't handle it on her own. In case she fell. Now it was different. She was with Andoni. And there was light in her room. I tried to imagine what would be happening up there. Juani pulled me out of my worries. Stand behind here. Just one of us looking should be enough. Barely five minutes since the light had turned on, Andoni came out the front door. We hid behind a column so that he wouldn't see us as he crossed in front of the car. Juani couldn't cloak her disappointment. We immediately walked up to the house. We've come back earlier than I said we would in the note, she said. How was the movie? And Andoni? Our daughter answered with dryness: He's gone. Did you get mad at each other or something? Not at all. We had a nice evening. Juani said that Andoni



could've stayed for dinner. Ama, you know perfectly well that tomorrow's a work day. The second time was after Christmas. A Thursday. It happened more or less the same way, with the only new thing being that they argued with each other and Andoni only accompanied her to the door. He helped her enter and he left. It rained that afternoon too, but fortunately we were able to get ourselves inside the cafeteria. The third time, at the beginning of the year, we found our daughter glancing at a magazine in the kitchen. Andoni was lying down on the bathroom floor. To his side appeared my toolbox and a sink half-full of murky water. What are you doing? He had cleared out the sink's pipes. The only thing left now was to tighten the screws with the crescent wrench. You could've let me do that. Calm down, Jesús. Juani and I didn't try it again. That idea seemed absolutely insane to me. I refused to tell her because, knowing my Juani, trying to open her eyes would've been a waste of time. She could wake up on her own, I thought. Sad.

We heard the boom from home. I was cleaning the seashells in the fish tank. The walls shook. The neighbor's dog started barking. Juani, who was getting ready to go to her Saturday mass at the Jesuits, didn't doubt it for a second: That was a bomb, turn on the TV. It was the regularly scheduled programming. In a little while we heard ambulance sirens, a bit far. It was a splendid spring day. We heard the first news of the attack from a local radio station. The broadcaster was talking about fatalities, he didn't say how many, and many wounded, some gravely. When we found out about the location of the explosion, I asked Juani where our daughter had gone to withdraw cash. If she's gone to a teller at the central bank, she answered, maybe she's seen something. She'll have to tell us about it when she comes back. She didn't come back. Coincidences of life: one of Andoni's cousins lent her the neckerchief they used to make our daughter's tourniquet. They said to each other, according to what they told us later: Hey, I know that girl. Our daughter was still conscious. Before they carried her to the ambulance, Andoni learned what happened. His cousin had called him over the phone and he called us. Juani was already wearing her street clothes; I left with what I had on. I felt incapable of driving. We were so nervous that neither one of

us managed to lock the door behind us. Our neighbor called us a taxi. Her dog had left for the landing. A collie that doesn't cause much trouble, for the most part. It barked at us without approaching to sniff us, as was customary. My daughter. She was undergoing emergency surgery. After a long while, they sent a nurse to inform us that the medical team was doing everything they could to save her right leg. At the moment, she said, what worries us most is the blood loss. What's more, she had other wounds, though less severe. We did not move from that waiting room where they asked us to wait. On the ceiling was a lamp. I still dream about it at night. It was a lamp with nothing special about it. I've seen them everywhere hundreds of times, but only that one has left a mark on my memory. It was getting dark out when one of the surgeons came. As soon as I saw his gesture, I shivered. In his opinion, her case was severe, but fortunately no vital organs were affected. On Juani's face I saw the same relief that was coursing through my body. Our daughter will live. The problem centered on one leg. They'll have to operate on it again. That's for sure. Other minor wounds had been able to be treated with stitches. The three of us had faces of bewilderment. We all looked at each other and looked at the health personnel that would come and go through the hall, as if waiting for someone to come and tell us that there was no reason to be worried. You're all stuck in a dream, a bad dream, that's it. But stay calm, because nothing you're seeing or feeling is real. They gave each of us a green robe and covers for our shoes. They called us in. They didn't let more than two of us in at a time. I left right away so that Andoni could see her too. And because my heart sank when I saw our daughter in that state. She wouldn't listen to anybody. She was unconscious. My daughter. I told Andoni I was waiting for him in the cafeteria. On the way there, I slipped away to the bathroom to cry. My problem is that I've never learned how to vent in silence. Juani can; I can't. She could be crying and, since you don't see it, you'd never know. Me, on the other hand, I whimper like a baby. I can't help it. So, while we were heading up the road to the hospital, she warned me: If you notice you're feeling emotional, go run to the bathroom. Don't make a scene in front of me, okay? And I did. I wiped my

tears with toilet paper. When Andoni arrived at the cafeteria, he had red eyes too. It looks like we've been lucky after all. Jesús, he replied staring at me seriously, others have been hit by a bomb much closer and nothing happened to them. They were lucky. We didn't stop stirring our spoons in our coffee. Some piece of the car swiped her leg. That's what the doctor suspected. That's the same reason why a passerby had died, an older gentleman, not counting everyone in the car. You'll have to postpone the wedding. Well, yeah. We spent another two or three minutes stirring our spoons nonstop. Sad.

She came into the dining room one afternoon. It was near the end of winter. That rich sea breeze scent that announces springtime was already floating through the air. You could even smell it inside the house. A perk of living on the coast. We suggested that our daughter apply for a wheelchair from the Basque Government. If they didn't offer us any aid we would buy it ourselves. She got mad. It seemed like a nuisance to her. With her crutches she could step up and down curbs, enter movie theaters, travel more easily on the bus. What if a screw loosened and fell out while she was walking? My Juani suspected that our daughter felt embarrassed to be seen on the street in a wheelchair. She insisted a wheelchair would help her move better through the house. Our daughter was against it, insisting that she wasn't a paraplegic. That if she started living sitting down, her legs would turn into rags. That she already depended on us too much to push her around everywhere. Her mother told her: You have to swallow your pride. Our daughter kept her crutches. She had learned to manage herself pretty well with them. The constant force they required had strengthened her arms. Her face had more color. The bad thing was that the doctor had recently insinuated it might benefit her to attempt a new surgical intervention. You could see the unease in her eyes. She was sleeping poorly. According to Juani, she was walking around the house at night. She can't stand her pain, Juani would whisper to me. By day we took note of the wrinkles between her eyes. That afternoon when she entered the dining room, it surprised me that she showed interest in the aquarium. Even so, she was watching what I was doing attentively. She asked

me what the tablet was for. I told her it was food for the janitor fish. Now it's hiding over there. It's a huge coward. But it'll find it. It always finds it. Soon it was going to be about a year since. My daughter wanted to know where we were when the bomb went off. Juani and I forbid each other from bringing up that subject. Do they put the news of an attack on the radio or on the TV? Not a word from us. Have the police caught any terrorists? Same thing. Our daughter, on the other hand, talks about the afternoon of her tragedy whenever she feels like it. The afternoon I went to get money, she usually says. We answered her by saying we had heard the explosion from home. Yeah, but where in the house. Juani neither remembered nor wanted to remember. I was with my fish. Aita, you and your fish. Juani pounced on her like a cat: He's better off entertaining himself with the fish than going to bars. Our daughter shook her off with her own response: It's up to me to decide between being a fish in aita's tank and being who I am, and I don't doubt that for an instant. As usual, some fish were swimming above the stones on the bottom, around the fallen tablet. They smelled it without swimming up to nibble on it. The tablet is for the janitor fish and they know it. Our daughter let out a laugh. The tablet, the janitor fish, she said. You have to see how easy it is for others to be happy! She was curious to know which of the fish I thought would be her if she were one of my fish. I didn't understand her at first. I liked seeing her smile so much that I played along. Up by the top, near the surface, a white molly was swimming. It was the only one of that kind I have left. It had been born in the aquarium. One day, at least three years ago, I went to clean the filter and I found two small fries inside, one already dead and that one. Its parents also didn't survive those months I neglected the aquarium. Though small, it just might be the oldest of the ones I have left. You're the white one. Why am I the white one? I've never been particularly witty. I shrugged my shoulders and said: You're the white one, that's all there is to it. Since that afternoon she started walking over to the aquarium more frequently than before. Where am I? I can't see myself. It filled her with joy to discover the molly hidden in between the plants. She would greet it,

address it by its proper name, and generally tell it funny things. She also used to tell it that she felt sorry for its loneliness. Sad.

On the other side of the river there's a pet store that I've never bought anything from. I went the other day, partly out of curiosity and partly to compare prices. On the ground floor they have an abundant assortment of books. I liked one with a lot of pictures, about aquarium plants. I returned it to the shelf after checking what it cost. I had to ask Juani about it. She's the one in charge of the money. On the way home, after I crossed the bridge, I saw him coming. It's hard not to notice a height like that. We met halfway. We hadn't seen each other in a few days. I assumed he was tied up with work or repairing the apartment. He asked me how's it going. It's going, I said, how about you? Oh, you know. We stood there silently. The woman holding his hand was wearing tight-fitting pants. Her head didn't even reach Andoni's shoulders, despite her high heels. He didn't introduce her to me. Well, take care, I told them. I turned around to watch them from the end of the bridge. By then they had already reached the strip of garden that precedes the houses. The woman was good-looking. I quickly lost them. Juani told me don't even think about it. It seemed too expensive to her. She added that right now we have other needs. Our daughter heard us and came to the kitchen. I've witnessed countless arguments between them. That one in particular more than any other. I was frightened by the looks they gave each other and the tone of their words. A bitter tone, an ugly tone. I intervened to tell them it wasn't worth fighting over a simple book. Juani talked back to me: If you're so interested in it then write it down on a piece of paper and wait til Three Kings Day. Our daughter left the kitchen. The rubber tip of her crutches made an angry noise at every contact with the ground. Don't worry, aita, she said from the hallway. I'll buy it for you. My daughter. I set off to dry the silverware on the dish rack with a cloth. No one told me to, but that's how I am. I foretold the imminent scolding from Juani. She finished scrubbing. Out of the corner of my eye I saw her drying her hands on her apron. She lowered her voice to tell me: Do you realize what a mess you've made? We don't have a dishwasher or a microwave, and you're still set on buying books. I

turned my head to make sure our daughter wasn't listening. In whispers I mentioned my encounter with Andoni this morning. And with his companion. Yes, holding hands. Juani adopted a natural tone of voice. Jesús, she said, you spend all day with your fish, your word searches and ball games, and you don't pay attention to what's happening around you. Andoni and our daughter had mutually agreed to end their relationship. But... you knew?, I asked her. Of course I knew. I know everything, she said, except you. She had had to notify all the relatives so that they wouldn't buy wedding gifts. I stayed quiet. What was I going to say? I continued drying the silverware. Juani went to bed. It seemed like she was getting another migraine. Andoni seemed nice to me. I don't think there are many like him. I'm sure we would have gotten along. Now I'll have to accept that he won't come to our house again. Okay, maybe he'll come visit sometime. He was an excellent person, but some things just aren't meant to be. Why give them any more thought? I hung the cloth on the hook. My conscience was killing me over the book issue. In the end I can do without it, given I have the aquarium full of plants. I should even pull some out to make more room for the fish. I decided to go to the dining room to ask my daughter not to buy me the book. The price was too much. I stopped dead in my tracks before I walked in. Through the closed door I could hear my daughter's voice. Come say hi to me, don't leave me here alone. Instead of resting my head on the couch, I went outside. I thought I would take advantage of the nice weather and stroll to the beach. I didn't get far. At the porch, next to the pharmacy, I bumped into my neighbor. Her collie approached with the obvious intent of having me pet its back. Jesús, she said to me, where are you going in slippers? I looked down at my feet in surprise. I was tempted to come up with an excuse, but what for. I went back home with my neighbor and her dog. I don't remember what we talked about anymore. I guess it would've been about something sad.

**Maritxu**  
**Fernando Aramburu**  
Translated by Jadon Barnett

*Visiting Room*

You can kill guards<sup>8</sup> and snitches, sure. But not kids. There's an awful heat in this room. Amatxo<sup>9</sup>, don't talk so loud, fuck, they're gonna hear us. Smells like a bug could be planted in here. And they have people that know Basque that can translate for them. And do they feed you well? Yes, ama, don't worry about it. Well I brought you pan de higo<sup>10</sup>. Homemade, eh? Not store bought.

Señora, please say your goodbyes. The forty-five minutes are already up. That soon? Listen, he's my son. Don't make this difficult, Señora. You should go, amatxo, *cause* if you don't then these bastards won't let me see you next time.

*Return Bus*

The highway passed through a rolling plot of land. Fields in the Burgos province, sweltering under the August sun. Not a single tree. Not a single house. Barren. Just a cloud of dust far away, trailing a lonely tractor.

If this *was* the Basque Country we'd have a forest and a bunch *a* green here, and some nice shade for Christ's sake. What's he saying? Bah, don't listen to him. Goal, goal, goal, gooooooooooooooooooooooooooal from Betis that's gonna open up the scoreboard, and what an amazing play! Hey you up front, tell the driver to turn down the radio. Soccer's so boring!

And do I really have to put up with all the hassle *a* traveling again? Maritxu, you have to cheer up. I'm very proud to be the sister of a gudari.<sup>11</sup> Right, *a* course, but I hope they don't kill any children. Cops, though, as

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<sup>8</sup> members of the Spanish Civil Guard

<sup>9</sup> amatxo - an endearing Basque word for mom

<sup>10</sup> a soft sweet bread made with figs and nuts

<sup>11</sup> gudari - a soldier who supports the Basque cause

many as you want. Well, Maritxu, if we're gonna go there, think about how many of us they killed in Gernika in '37. They started it.

What's she saying? Who, Maritxu? She's worked up over nothing. This is her first trip. She should talk to her priest. I've gone to mine a lot to ask if the armed conflict is sinful and the priest has always said be calm, Puri, for as soon as we reclaim our rights there will be peace. You hear that, Maritxu? I don't know, I don't know. How much longer til Vitoria? An hour. Still?

### *Town Plaza*

A plastic placard covered the pavilion railing. It had been there since before the festivals, over a month ago. The kids had added the name of Maritxu's son to the usual ones with paint. Dong, dong, dong: 9pm on the bell tower's clock.

The BNP<sup>12</sup> mayor was coming through the colonnade with his daughter, both slurping an ice cream cone, and approached everyone on the bus. What's up, have a nice trip? The heat was unbearable. Señor, don't act nice, we're not going to vote for you. When's the trial? The fifteenth. Don't worry about the cost, eh? That's what the town hall is for.

### *Audiencia Nacional,<sup>13</sup> Room 3, September 15<sup>th</sup>*

When they handcuffed her son and landed him in jail, Maritxu almost shed a tear. He and two others were laughing, and as they began to greet the group and the group greeted them, Maritxu calmed down. Are you excited? Let's see!

And the judge, bang, bang, strikes vengeance with his gavel, and silence, and the defendants, fists in the air, singing the Eusko Gudariak.<sup>14</sup> We do not recognize the court of the fascist state of Spain. What'd he say? They won't collaborate with the repressive state apparatus, that's for sure. I can see

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<sup>12</sup> the Basque National Party (Eusko Alkartasuna), which promotes Basque regionalism and nationalism

<sup>13</sup> the centralized Spanish court

<sup>14</sup> "Basque Soldiers" - the anthem of the Basque army during the Spanish Civil War



they've been starving my son. I *hafta* find out if they've tortured him. I'll make a scene, eh? *Course* I will.

### *Gas Station*

Do you all see that steep cliff between the mountains? From there to there, Spain, see? From there to this side, the homeland of the Basque. And for as long as they don't accept this, there'll be *fightin*. And they can shove their democracy up their ass.

Maritxu looked toward where the old man with the badge was pointing. He spotted some steep slopes, rocky and dotted with pine trees. Two scavenger birds were flying over top of one of the peaks. The sun was just starting to set behind.

And they better get ready because for us Basques, when we get an idea in our heads, not even God can pull it out.

Maritxu was suddenly hit with memories from when she was a child. At the old man's house, when Franco was alive, they would hang the Spanish flag on the balcony. If there was a march they would go to the front row in their red berets, and now this.

Begoña's sister finally comes out of the bathroom. Maritxu has been meaning to ask her since this morning. I've been told that she'll marry your son when they get out *a* jail. If they're hit with a ton *a* years then that'll be tough. It depends. Depends on what? On if ETA forces them to be pardoned and if they work to reduce their sentence. God willing.

### *At Home*

Pills for my illness. One after each meal with a big gulp *a* water. The contraindications? *All written in convoluted Spanish*. I understand it when it's on TV, but this is Chinese to me. The phone. She was startled so much that she almost dropped the bottle on the floor.

Twenty-eight years, Maritxu. Whaaat? I'll die of old age and he'll still be locked in there. Calm down because in practice it's only eight or nine. And Begoña? They let her go. Thank God at least one is going to be saved! They couldn't prove that she knew what was inside the bag. Joxian though? Easily. Don't worry, eh? Be proud of the son that you raised, Maritxu. Alright, agur.<sup>15</sup> Do you hear all that yelling behind me? We're out celebrating Begoña's freedom.

Not even two hours had passed and the kids were already posting her son's photo all over the walls of the town. A light drizzle was falling and to her it seemed better to stay in, because of her cold; but she leaned over the balcony with an umbrella and suddenly was irritated that they were calling him Potolo.<sup>16</sup> His name is Joxian, period. Potolo my ass. She looked at the portrait of her late husband on the wall of her living room. He was coming from Tolosa on a motorcycle, quite a while ago, in '76. It was raining harder than today and he skidded off the road. Joshé, they hit our son with twenty-eight years. Just so you know.

The glass that protected the photo was cracked. As a result of the search. The guards stuck their hands all over everything. They even looked in the freezer. Shameless. The frame fell down, or they threw it. The one with the black beard was so disgusting to Maritxu that she threw all her frozen food in the trash as soon as he left. She wouldn't eat anything that guy had touched even if she were crazy. And *acourse* Joxian was in France. What were they thinking, that he was just gonna be here waiting to be hunted down?

Joshé, in the photo, had these ears that he could've used to fly if he wiggled hard enough. Look how short you were. At the same time though, if Joxian doesn't bend down, then he'll knock his head on the top *a* the doorframe. Don't let me forget to put a candle out for Ignacio<sup>17</sup> so they don't take him away to the Canaries. Anything but the Canaries, Joshé. Total end *a* the world.

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<sup>15</sup> agur - a Basque valediction

<sup>16</sup> potolo - chubby

<sup>17</sup> Saint Ignatius of Loyola, who founded the Jesuits

Tomorrow he'll be in the newspapers. And I can't get those sick monsters outta my head. You'd be better off killed on the street, that way you wouldn't have had to turn yourself in. You kids need to stay outta conflict, eh Joshé? Now, maybe it wasn't Joxian but another one *a* the group who pulled the detonator. I'll ask him on the next visit, or *whadda* you think?

### *At the Market*

“Potolo askatu”<sup>18</sup> over here, “Potolo askatu” over there. And on the town hall balcony a photo of Joxian so huge that it took up half the front of the building. Is that Potolo's mom? Señora, over here! Maritxu was going from stand to stand. No way were they going to accept her money. She had her cart full of fruits and vegetables and they were still giving her more. Every once in a while her gaze would drift over to the large poster with her son's face and suddenly they would be calling her name again. Take his bag of nuts. Take these perretxikos.<sup>19</sup> They even gave her a bundle of arum lilies. She dared to tell a lady who was selling homemade cheese that I live alone, I don't need more. The lady got mad. If she had taken from the others, why not her?

### *A While Later, at the Entryway, and the Next Day, at Home*

The metal mailbox had four holes on the bottom part so that you could see if there was a letter. And there was something white inside, so a letter or propaganda. But she opened it and no. As soon as she saw the doll, Maritxu thought it would be a present. Maybe a girl from the neighborhood was showing her support, but then she read the note attached with a string around its neck and she understood. The doll fit in the palm of her hand. In memory of those killed by Potolo. They had smeared its face and tiny clothes with red paint. It was missing an arm and a leg.

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<sup>18</sup> askatu - the basque word for “to free”

<sup>19</sup> perretxiko - a springtime mushroom

In the morning, Maritxu looked for the doll in the trash can so she could show it to Begoña. Yuck, chica, it's not here. What'd it look like? Super small, pink plastic. Nothing special. Well there's no toy store in town. But just in case, I'll ask around the candy stores to see if they remember anyone who's bought a doll. Chica, don't you wanna take some lettuce with you? Look how much they just gave me. Maritxu, not a word of this to Joxian, eh? He'll be upset if he finds out they're still bothering you. My lips are sealed. These pranks are just sickening, don't you think? Well, I'm gonna go ask around. Do me a favor and take some lettuce and a few leeks with you.

### *Visiting Room*

I didn't know you *call* yourself Potolo, with how thin you are now and all! That's our business, ama. Well to me you're Joxian and no one's gonna drag me outta here. It's so cold in this dump that my skin's peeling. I think the other jail was a lot better. Don't say that. How much time do we have? I came in at twenty of, right? Now I don't remember, but don't worry. We'll keep going until they come and try to throw you out. Has Begoña told you about that tribute? She told me a little. You have no idea how much the town adores you. Like a hero. Good to know, *preciate* it. Several leaders spoke, and at the end, two kids with their faces covered went up to the pavilion to set a Spanish flag on fire, which I hope we don't get in trouble for.

Señora, I have to inform you that your visiting time has expired. That can't be. I came in at ten of! Amatxo, please, don't pull me into this circus every time you come here.

### *Landing*

She scaled the last few steps looking for the key in her purse. It would be because of that, and because she was coming back tired from her trip, that she didn't see it until she stepped foot on the doormat. Something was

bulging up underneath. Aw Hell! This time the doll was missing its head. The note had been tied to its leg by a string just like last time. In memory of... She stopped reading there. Why bother? She threw the doll through the gap in the staircase. A half hour or so later she went down to the entryway to pick it up. To show it to Begoña. The doll was no longer there on the floor of the entryway.

No one in town sells little toys and dolls like the one you're describing, but it doesn't matter *cause* whoever that bastard is we're gonna catch him. I'll take care of it, Maritxu. Even if they're police or some smartass.

### *At the Living Room Table*

And it's going on a year now since you've been in jail and I miss you so much, what can a mother say. And I don't know what else to write today so I'm gonna stop *cause* I like to talk much more than write.

Joshé, his face parted by the crack in the glass, looked just like always. What're you lookin at, Joshé? In life you were as quiet as a mouse. Well you haven't changed a bit. *Whaddy* think? Do I tell him about Begoña? Yes or no?

Bitches. That's what they are. Poor Joxian.

I'd seen her at parties lined up to dance around the charanga.<sup>20</sup> Her face all red from getting wasted, I bet. Her boyfriend's in jail and she's out partying, sweating like a dog.

*Cause* that's what they are, Joshé. Drooling bitches. Men grabbing her all over. All *a* them and her and her sister, another one *a* their group, shirts dripping wet with sweat. And they get to be *gudaris*? And Joxian is in jail. Twenty-eight years. The best years *a* his life sacrificed for the Basque country. And they're feeling up his girlfriend til one in the morning, when all the decent women *already gone home*.

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<sup>20</sup> a small marching band common in northern Spain

Do I tell him, Joshé? *Whaddya* think? The day you answer me there'll be a flock *a* priests flying over the whole town. You're quiet and short. What a burden.

*On the Way Back from Mass*

Maritxu! Puri! How's it going? Alright.

I haven't been seeing Puri lately. She wasn't showing up to our trips anymore since they let her son go.

I have him in Bilbao, inside a publishing house for books and records. But not reintegrated, see, because he accepted the whole sentence. The other day the one from the tavern came to me, the lost cause. She goes and asks me with a smile if my son is one of the ones they picked for reintegration. Did she tell you that too? Can't believe it. I stood there lookin at her so angry I couldn't believe it. I swear it's a miracle I didn't walk up and smack her.

On various balconies and windows hung the poster calling for the transfer of prisoners to Euskal Herria.<sup>21</sup> Maritxu had to ask for another at the *herriko taberna*<sup>22</sup> because she knew she tied the first badly. A few days later the wind picked up and goodbye.

Oi, *they* still bothering you? They left me alone a while ago. They must be from the Victims Association, gang *a* spineless crooks. You think so? Who else? I haven't been attacked for a while now. Joxian's girlfriend must've *gave* notice and some guys have been watching my doorway from the house across the street. Well done. Maybe they won't dare anymore. We have to give them a piece *a* our mind, Maritxu, so they stop beating us up.

On the wall, soaked from the rain, her son's picture smiled at her. Puri was talking about hers again: Bilbao, publishing house, so much for the Basque culture. Over her shoulder, Potolo askatu. That irritated Maritxu to no end. That's it, any *a* these night's I'll go out into the street with a can *a* paint to erase the Potolo nonsense and write Joxian on top of it.

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<sup>21</sup> Euskal Herria - the Basque country

<sup>22</sup> *herriko taberna* - the town tavern, where separatists gather

### *Going to Confess*

They must have been following her clandestinely, otherwise how would they know that she had been sitting next to the column lately? In the old days the women would sit on the right, the men on the left. Upon entering, Joshé would offer her holy water in his hand so that she could wet her fingers, and then he would go to one side and she to the other. Not anymore, now they all sit wherever they want. Maritxu stuck with the custom. But about a month ago she moved to the left. She liked that spot more because the statue of St. Ignacio is closer to her. Ignacio, she whispered to him. And plus she could see his face better in the dim light of the church. Ignacio, get *him out a jail* for me as soon as you can. Ignacio, protect *him from* me. With no other saint did Maritxu have so much conversation.

First, as always, was to light the candle. And then, ching, I would drop the coin into the box. The light bulb in the confessional was out, so let's pray. Someone must have been spying on her, someone who was following behind her, someone who knew. As soon as she sat down she saw it: a little head that at first she thought might be a gumball on the floor. She didn't want to touch it in case the red spots were fresh. And the note from those punks. Let her Father read it. She felt a prick in her chest. Then she looked all around her. To the empty benches. To an old woman who came in making the sign of the Cross. To the columns in case there were people behind. To the pulpit. To the altarpiece. Ignacio, who's doing this to me?

Goodbye confession. She left in a hurry in fear of screaming in the middle of the church.

### *To Begoña's House*

She took a shortcut around the front of the building. Let's see if I catch her before she leaves for work. There was a gang of abertzales<sup>23</sup> on the

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<sup>23</sup> abertzal - a supporter of Basque independence

scaffolding. They had already painted the snake and the ax and were putting up the acronyms.

Damn, Maritxu, *where you* running off to? He dropped the paint can and clownishly came up to her to stamp her with two tobacco-scented kisses. Shove off, kid, I'm in a hurry. One for you and one for Potolo when you see him. For Joxian, if you don't mind.

In the corner two kids were playing pelota.

Ruined. When I found out that Joxian was involved in all that, uf... Well, that's what God punishes most, Maritxu. Children are sacred. I guess so, Ignacio. But understand that he is my son and I don't have another one.

They saluted her as she crossed the plaza. She didn't notice.

Since you're not helping me I don't know what's gonna happen. Tell God I'll renounce his glory if he doesn't forgive him. You ask a lot *a* me. Oi, you were sort of a loose cannon as a kid too, weren't you?

It's me. They opened the gate for her, and then the door to the apartment. A beard falling halfway down his chest, glasses, and smoking. Being any uglier was impossible. Begoña? At work. There was another one looking like a pig in his underwear at the end of the corridor. The whole place smelled like fresh coffee. Wanna leave a message? She was itching to ask, but she held her tongue. They're not from the village. Did she let them sleep here? Maybe.

### *Visiting Room*

That doesn't mean anything, amatxo. And if you're gonna come here to tell me strange stories then I *rather* you not come. Well why, if it's the truth? Well because you're leaving me in stitches. You're telling me some things but hiding others. What've I been keeping from you? You know all about it, don't give me that bullshit. If you don't explain yourself...! Did you get the postcard? Don't change the subject. Apparently you're being harassed by the enemy and you haven't told me anything. Oh, that? I've also asked you if they tortured you before and you haven't answered me. You think being locked up



here isn't torture enough? Listen, we're not gonna to start arguing, are we? Do we not understand each other that much?

She looked at her son and didn't know what to say.

The Basque Government's given Puri's son a job. Good for him. Well look how cold you are today Joshé.

Your time is up, Señora. She thought about protesting, but she saw Joxian walk off without saying goodbye. She stood there in silence, empty, and a six hour trip was still waiting for her.

### *In the Kitchen*

How the hell can you be so blind? Hey, don't yell at me, eh? Don't yell at you? You fucked up our relationship! Me? You're the one bringing men *inna* your house. Ay, ama, those guys?! Don't you know they were fighters too? Sure, *acourse*. As God knows you knew. Leave God alone, He didn't do anything to you. Now I can see where all this is coming from. You never liked me going out with Joxian. What do I care? I noticed it from the beginning, Maritxu, from the first time I walked through that door. Noticed what? Of course I noticed. You think I'm stupid? Well, just so you know, he was going after me and not the other way around, he was asking me: are we going out or what, and now you've *went* and started a fight and the poor guy's down in the dumps, what with how fragile he is. My son? Fragile? Where'd you pull that one out of? Please, Maritxu, open your eyes. Well, I was with him yesterday and he said nothing. What do you mean, nothing, he told me everything over the phone! What'd he tell you? That he stood you up. Not true, it was my time to go. Look, Maritxu, believe it or not, I don't cheat on my boyfriend. That's all I gotta say and I'm leaving and it's best that you and I don't see each other for a while.

In the hallway, under the lamp with the five tulips, she suddenly stopped. Maritxu, stiff, stubborn, held her gaze.

One more thing before I leave. Throw whatever you want at me. You've already had so much to say!

Begoña shook her head.

I think you made up that whole thing about the dolls. Anything else? You say they're giving you dolls with blood on them. Well, I still haven't seen one yet. Chica, not even one. Very mysterious, isn't it? Maybe I eat them with cheese and wine.

Alone, at last. They can leave me alone, go to hell for all I care. What do you think, Joshé? She's right about one thing. I don't like her. She's not for Joxian, right, Joshé?

## Basque Glossary

*abertzal*: patriot; a supporter of Basque independence

*agur*: a Basque valediction; goodbye

*ama*: mother; mom

*amatxo*: an endearing Basque word for mom

*aita*: father; dad

*askatu*: to free

*Euskal herriak*: the Basque Country

*Eusko gudariak*: Basque soldiers; the title of the Basque national anthem

*gudari*: a soldier; one who supports the Basque cause

*herriko taberna*: the town tavern, where separatists gather

*perretxiko*: a springtime mushroom

*potolo*: chubby

## **Creative Reflection & Discussion**

A translator's translation, however informed it may be, is just one interpretation of a text (Lederer 1). The author, the translator, and the reader hold the power to interpret the text as they choose. However, the reader experiences the translator's portrayal of the story and not the author's original portrayal. Consequently, the translator's interpretation is just as influential as the author's interpretation on the reader's ability to experience the events and aesthetics of the story. It is my responsibility to describe my interpretation of Aramburu's stories so that the reader may further develop his or her own, as well as recognize any points of bias that may have resulted from my interpretation.

"Fish of Bitterness," is the story of a father and his daughter, an unnamed young woman who leaves the hospital after losing all function in one leg due to a coincidental car bombing. The story is told from the perspective of the father, Jesús. The daughter does what she can to adjust to her new crutch-and-wheelchair-bound lifestyle but she faces great depression in her newfound reliance on others to complete everyday activities that she used to take for granted, such as bathing or walking alongside the sea. Meanwhile, her mother Juani experiences frequent migraines, her once promising engagement to her fiancé Andoni falls apart, and her bumbling father becomes so absorbed by his own grief that he fails to recognize and support his daughter in dealing with her own. This is represented acutely in his tending to his pet fish, paying far more attention to them than to her. In fact, his ignorance becomes so great that he only learns about his daughter's breakup months later when he encounters Andoni on the street with another woman. The story ends with the father's voluntary absorption into the normalities of everyday life, such as walking to the pet store or greeting his neighbor's dog. As he heads out the door, he hears his

daughter say to his fish, “Come say hi to me, don’t leave me here alone,” which perfectly captures the relationship between his daughter and him.

In “Maritxu,” the titular character is a mother whose son, Joxian, has recently been convicted for his participation in a terrorist attack. The son is not the sole perpetrator yet he is the one to bear the greatest sentencing, as his girlfriend Begoña is not found guilty and a fellow *fighter* is released and granted a job placement by the Basque government. Maritxu has to make frequent six-hour trips between the Basque Country and Madrid, where Joxian is being held, and these trips begin to wear down on her spirit.<sup>24</sup> She also faces the idolization of her son and herself by others in the town who now see them as heroic. All the while, someone continues to secretly leave little dolls for her that remind her of the children killed in her son’s bombing. Her internal and external conflicts climax when she learns that Begoña is partying with other men. She relates this to Joxian, and when their conversation goes south, she outbursts onto Begoña. When Begoña reveals that she has been the one scaring Maritxu with the dolls, Begoña exits the mother’s and son’s life and Maritxu is left to face ruin: her son’s ruined life, the ruined relationship with her son, and the ruined lives of the child victims.

The main characters in “Fish of Bitterness” are the victims of terrorism solely by chance (Alonso-Rey 4). In “Maritxu,” we see how the perpetrators of terrorism and their families are similarly damaged by the idea and the commitment of the act. The destruction of terrorism reaches far and wide, transforming every aspect of life even for those who avoid or ignore the conflict. These are the messages that I have intended to portray in my translation, and I have paid careful attention to every aspect of Aramburu’s stories, from his prose and his word choice to even his chosen titles, to inform my decisions.

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<sup>24</sup> I have experienced the same six-hour bus ride between the Basque Country and Madrid during the winter. I cannot imagine the added unbearable heat of a summer bus ride.

## Titles: Translating “Los peces de la amargura” and “Maritxu”

Rabassa writes that the “immediate problem” of translating *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien años de soledad*) results from the multiple potential interpretations that an English reader would have to differentiate:

In some cases the original title is simply out of the question...and care must be taken to see that the solution falls within the spirit of the original...A simple declarative title like *Cien años de soledad* should offer no trouble whatever [sic]. Think again...*Cien* is our first problem because in Spanish it bears no article so that the word can waver between *one* hundred and *a* hundred. There is no hint in the title as to which it should be in English. We are faced with the same interpretive dilemma as the translator of the *Aeneid* as he starts off with *Arma virumque cano*. A man or *the* man? By Latin standards it could be (and is) both. Virgil didn't have to decide but his translator must. In my case I viewed the extent of time involved as something quite specific, as in prophecy, something definite, a countdown, not just any old hundred years. What is troublesome, of course, is that both interpretations are conjoined subconsciously for the reader of the Spanish, just as in the Latin example they are for the Romans. But an English speaker reading the Spanish will have to decide subconsciously which meaning is there. They cannot be melded in his mind. I was convinced and I still am that [Márquez] meant it in the sense of *one* as this meaning is closer to the feel of the novel. (Rabassa 95-96)

I faced a very similar challenge in the translation of the title of “Fish of Bitterness” (“Los peces de la amargura”). I followed Rabassa’s logic to tackle it because I agree with his deliberation wholeheartedly: when I read Virgil’s *Aeneid* in the original Latin, I too asked myself whether *virum* referred to *a man* or *the man* and found enjoyment in pondering both interpretations at the same time, suspensefully anticipating when one reality would suddenly overtake the other in the text. In Spanish, the definite article *el/la/los/las* (all *the* in English) is used when speaking about

a noun in the general sense whereas no article is used in English.<sup>25</sup> Because of this, “Los peces” can simultaneously signify *fish* (the general) or *the fish* (the specific). The specific interpretation (*the fish*) makes sense in the context of the story because the father resorts to caring for his fish in order to cope with the tragedy of his daughter’s victimhood. Despite this, I decided to use the general interpretation in order to shift the symbolism of the title back onto the daughter. The daughter is also a fish of bitterness. She is not alone in her suffering as she is not the lone victim of terrorism in Spain. There is a whole sea of victims, and this sentiment also extends to her family members who are affected by the attack indirectly. Since I wish to emphasize that the daughter is sidelined in her own story and want the image of fish to extend beyond those in the pet fish tank, I made this choice for the English-speaking reader.

Translating the title of “Maritxu,” was a simpler yet more meaningful task. *Maritxu* is the name of the main character and the Basque form of the name *Mary* (Astero), so it is appropriate to make no changes to the title (Rabassa 95). At the same time though, the name *Maritxu* is difficult for English speakers to pronounce especially because of the position of the *x*. The Basque *tx* is pronounced like the *ch* in *chocolate*. While *Spanishizing* or *Englishizing* the name to *Marichu*, *María*, or *Mary* would be an easy solution, it would be an inappropriate solution to me because promoting the Basque language and culture is one of the goals of my translation. Therefore I decided to keep the title and the character’s name as-is despite any inconvenience to the reader.

### Basque in the Stories

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<sup>25</sup> For example, to say that *apples are fruits* in English, as in all apples that exist are fruits, one would not need to include the word *the*. To say the same thing in Spanish, one would include the definite article *las*: *las manzanas son frutas* (*the apples are fruits*).

While over one thousand works are published in Basque each year (Basque Cultural Institute), its language and culture continue to lack relevancy in American culture. We scarcely see media in Basque, with Basque characters, or that take place in the Basque Country. When I presented my research for this project at the Made in Millersville conference in 2023, most attendees who visited my presentation were unaware of the Basque Country or its enduring political conflicts. I want my translations to promote Aramburu's stories, really the stories of Basque people, to English-speaking readers and the American public. I have taken multiple steps to accomplish my goal.

The most important action of my translation has been to preserve all Basque words featured in the stories. It is a common trope in American media that characters who speak a minority language will speak an entire sentence in English and add one or two words in their native language. However, this is not only how Aramburu portrays his characters in "Fish of Bitterness" and "Maritxu," but also what I experienced when I visited the Basque region; for example, I once witnessed two women greet each other with the Basque word *kaixo* (*hello*) before conversing entirely in Spanish. Aramburu draws upon his personal experiences when his characters end an otherwise Spanish conversation with *agur* (goodbye) just as I draw upon my personal experience when I make no changes to the translation in this regard despite the stereotype (Aramburu 20, 66).

The second step has been to provide footnotes and a glossary of each Basque word so that the English reader can understand the context behind the words. Aramburu includes a glossary in his publication of the stories, mentioning that Basque people frequently include these words when they speak Spanish (241), though I decided to further create footnotes that explain the words without the reader's needing to flip to another page, out and far away from the immersion



of the story. I also chose not to italicize the Basque words in the stories, which is often done by authors and translators in order to emphasize that the word comes from another language.

Aramburu does not add a special style to the Basque words in “Fish of Bitterness” but he does so in “Maritxu.” I decided to maintain the lack of styling from “Fish of Bitterness” in my translation of both texts.<sup>26</sup> Besides, I believed that the small number following each word was distinguishing enough; further adornment would be too distracting.

There are also some Spanish terms that I explained particularly for the English-speaking reader that the Spanish reader would naturally understand. For example, Maritxu mentions killing “guards,” but she refers specifically to members of Spain’s national law enforcement, not unlike the American image of soldiers (63). This would not be obvious to many English-speaking readers. Furthermore, I did not want to edit the dialogue so that Maritxu specifies the type of guard she is referencing because it is not what she says in the original text and because there is no reason for Maritxu to explain to Joxian what a civil guard is. He should know. Instead I left a footnote that addresses both concerns. Likewise, I explain the game of Basque pelota in a footnote whereas the father in “Fish of Bitterness” calls it a “pelota game” in the same sense that we would say *the football game* or *the tennis match* (19).

### Colloquial Speech

The conventions of colloquial language differ between all languages. In the case of English and Spanish, some elements of the original language’s colloquial speech must unfortunately be lost in translation in order to maintain the *sense* of colloquial speech in the target language. For example, many English words that have Germanic roots (*to see, to get, bloody*) have synonyms with Latin roots (*to view, to obtain, sanguineous*). In our language, the

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<sup>26</sup> Refer to the next subheading for more context surrounding the italicized words in “Fish of Bitterness” and “Maritxu.”

words with Latin roots often have a connotation of complexity and sophistication. They are *bigger, more difficult*, and sometimes *more serious* than words with Germanic roots. This dynamic does not exist in the Spanish language because the majority of its words come from Latin. Thus, when translating from Spanish to English, the translator must decide whether a Germanic word or a Latin word is more appropriate in context. In “Fish of Bitterness,” the father laments his daughter’s weakened state when he sees her walk with crutches for the first time (15). The word he uses to describe her state is “su fragilidad,” or *her fragility*. A somewhat literal translation of these words makes perfect sense in English, though with some awkwardness: “I felt a sharp pain inside upon seeing her fragility.” On one hand, this phrase feels too formal. *Fragility* is not a common word in our everyday vocabulary. Would an Everyman really say this in colloquial speech? On the other hand, *fragility* is aesthetically perfect for the situation. The daughter is not just weakened, but now built delicately like glass. One might imagine a *Fragile: Handle with Care* sticker on a cardboard box. Is it more appropriate to keep the phrase as-is? To incorporate both ideas, I decided to change *fragility* to *fragile* (still a Latin word) and surround it with an additional three Germanic words (*how, she, and was*). The resulting phrase is “I felt a sharp pain inside when I saw how fragile she was,” which I believe to be a compromise that resembles what a native English speaker might say in this situation.

Unfortunately, I also found a compromise in losing some aspects of colloquial speech. The Spanish word *que* can mean *what, that, or than*. In colloquial Spanish *que* can additionally mean ‘*cause* (the shortening of *because*) or be placed at the beginning of an utterance to soften its abruptness and make it more casual or familiar. The daughter in “Fish of Bitterness” displays the latter meaning when she tells Juani that she is getting married: “Que me caso, amá” (22). *Que* here is a softener. The daughter wants Juani to understand that she is excited because she is

getting married. The father also uses this version of *que* when he repeats that his daughter wants to go to the sea: “Que quería ir al mar” (15). There is no English translation for this form of *que*. In both scenarios above—respectively “I’m getting married, mom” and “She wanted to go to the sea”—removing *que* hardly alters the meaning of the utterance. English-speaking readers still comprehend that the daughter is excited about her engagement and that she wants to see the sea, so I considered it appropriate to remove this form of *que* altogether.

Another element that has been lost in translation is the significance behind the father’s repeated refusal to name his daughter. To the American reader, it may appear that the father has neglected his daughter such that he has forgotten her name or refuses to grant her agency in the story through naming her. In reality, referring to one’s daughter as *la hija* (*the daughter*) is a form of showing endearment toward her. In other words, this is a reminder that the father does care about his daughter throughout “Fish of Bitterness.” When it was time to translate this very frequent phrase, I was certain that keeping it as *the daughter* would be too strange in English. I was dissatisfied with saying *my girl* or *my little girl* because these phrases add an element of infantilization that is not quite as strong in the original Spanish. I ultimately decided to change every instance of this phrase to *my daughter*, fully aware that his failure to name her would adopt a new meaning in English. On the surface, *my daughter* appears to be a passive form of neglect. A reader with a more profound knowledge of Spanish culture may understand the phrase’s true meaning. I support both interpretations of the text, and so my altering of the source text is a conscious choice that fulfills my goal of allowing the reader to experience the text in a form similar to the original while also allowing a greater dimension of interpretations.

“Maritxu” warranted the most dramatic translational operation. Unlike “Fish of Bitterness,” “Maritxu” frequently features Spanish colloquialisms in italics. For example, “*sería*”

(*would be*) is a prescriptively grammatically incorrect usage of what should be *fuera* (*were to be*) “*ande*” is an altered pronunciation of *ante* (*before; facing*), and “*pallá*” is an informal contraction of *para allá* (*to over there*) (63-65). Since these colloquialisms are italicized like the Basque words, and because the Basque town mayor and the worker in the Madrid jail are the only characters who do not use these colloquialisms, I interpret that Aramburu implies the main characters’ relative lack of education. The story’s ironic and satirical elements support this idea. For instance, when Maritxu’s friend Puri asks her priest whether the armed conflict is sinful, he replies that only reclaiming their rights will achieve peace (64). Similarly, Maritxu remarks that the Spanish text on her pill bottle is “Chinese to her” (66).<sup>27</sup> With the main characters’ potential lack of formal education in mind, it follows that my translation would strive to emphasize their education level through prescriptively improper grammar. However, I took immense care in my portrayal and intensity of these colloquialisms spanning multiple rewrites because, although I wanted to imply that the characters are uneducated, I did not want to wholly impose the racial and cultural dynamics and stigmas of American dialects, including AAVE and Appalachian English. I feared that the overuse of nonstandard grammatical structures or characteristics that belong to a specific dialect (AAVE’s habitual *be*, Appalachian English’s double nouns, etc.) could signal a racial, ethnic, or classist stereotype that conveys an image wildly different from what would typically depict people from the Basque Country. To best adapt the Spanish and Basque colloquialisms for the English-speaking reader, I decided to use italics in the narration and dialogue to:

- I. highlight a Basque word;
- II. signal colloquialisms and informal speech; or

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<sup>27</sup> Amusingly, this idiom translates cleanly into English.

III. imply a diverse upbringing or lack of education regarding standard language use. This is why I also italicized Maritxu's mention of the text on her pill bottle. As for the colloquialisms and informal speech, I included phrases that are similar to the Spanish ones and that can generally be found in multiple American dialects without strictly implying one particular background. For example, the sound of *f* in *of* is frequently deleted in the same fashion of everyday conversation: "That's it, any *a* these night's I'll go out into the street with a can *a* paint" (71). Similarly, forms of the word *be* are contracted or omitted where appropriate: "Maritxu, *where you* running off to?" (73). I feel that this compromise does not stray too far from Aramburu's source text, the features of casual conversation, or our contemporary sensibilities regarding the topic of linguistic discrimination.

### Prose

Aramburu's prose in both stories is unusual in comparison to the typical formatting of a novel. The characters' dialogue never has a paragraph separate from the narration; it carries neither quotation marks nor *comillas* («»), which Spanish texts use in the same way. The lack of a clear, uncontested divide between narration and dialogue means not only that the line between the characters' thoughts and reality are blurred, but also that the reader bears the task of drawing these lines, having been granted a greater opportunity to interpret the text in unique ways. For example, consider my translated passage from "Fish of Bitterness" in which the father reacts to the news that his daughter is engaged to Andoni:

I remember the first time I spoke to him. He saw me in the living room, with the aquarium lid raised. I shook his hand. A hand, without exaggerating, twice as big as mine. Feeding the fish, eh? Well yeah. He stood there a while watching them without saying anything. Suddenly he stood upright and said: Pretty. From that moment he seemed nice. So to me it seemed fine that my daughter wanted to marry him. Andoni had a good job, he dressed and acted with decency, he was paying installments on a home, and on top of

that he had said liked my fish. To me, the perfect son-in-law, and to Juani too. What's happening is that she is the way she is, nose-y and argumentative, and she has to have the last word, whatever they're talking about. She sent our daughter to bed. It was clear she didn't believe her. Tomorrow we'll talk. I'm getting married, ama. I haven't been drinking. Right, right, you must have been up all night hitting the holy water. I butted in: Congratulations. Juani rolled over in bed. With a tug of the blanket she left me, as they say, out in the open. You be quiet. Gracias, aita. That was the last thing our daughter said before closing the door. The room was once again filled with darkness. Juani mocked me: Congratulations, congratulations. Do you think you just won a raffle or something? If only she knew what it's like to be married! Sad. (Aramburu 22)

Here, the scene moves from narration (“A hand...twice as big as mine.”) to dialogue (“Feeding the fish, eh? Well yeah.”) without a clear separation, punctuation, or indication other than that the sentences are non-sequiturs if interpreted wholly as one or the other. The reader must consider the context of the scene to logically assign “Feeding the fish?” as Andoni’s line and “Well yeah.” as the father’s. As Juani, the daughter, and the father talk further in the paragraph, who is *I* changes without warning: “I’m getting married, ama. I haven’t been drinking,” says the daughter, “Right, right, you must have been up all night hitting the holy water,” replies Juani, and “I butted in: Congratulations,” is the father’s re-entrance to the conversation. Rivas-Hernández (224) notes that the father is a man of “escasas palabras” (a few words) and that “the repetition of the word ‘sad’...brings to light the incapability of uttered language to describe such emotional intensity.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, to bring each of these ideas together, the dialogue-as-narration and repetition of “sad” replace what would normally be the narrator’s inner thoughts due to his inability to articulate his emotions. Thus the reader articulates them for him.

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<sup>28</sup> Translated from Spanish: “La repetición de la palabra ‘triste’ pone de manifiesto la incapacidad del lenguaje articulado para describir tanta intensidad emocional.” (Riva-Hernández 224).

Aramburu also combines dialogue and narration in “Maritxu.” My following translated passage from the story is the final argument between Maritxu and Begoña concerning their relationship to Joxian:

How the hell can you be so blind? Hey, don't yell at me, eh? Don't yell at you? You fucked up our relationship! Me? You're the one bringing men *inna* your house. Ay, ama, those guys?! Don't you know they were fighters too? Sure, *acourse*. As God knows you knew. Leave God alone, He didn't do anything to you. Now I can see where all this is coming from. You never liked me going out with Joxian. What do I care? I noticed it from the beginning, Maritxu, from the first time I walked through that door. Noticed what? Of course I noticed. You think I'm stupid? Well, just so you know, he was going after me and not the other way around, he was asking me: are we going out or what, and now you've *went* and started a fight and the poor guy's in a deep depression, what with how fragile he is. My son? Fragile? Where'd you pull that one out of? Please, Maritxu, open your eyes. (Aramburu 74)

Just like in the previous passage from “Fish of Bitterness,” it is not immediately clear which line belongs to whom. “How the hell can you be so blind?” and “You fucked up our relationship!” can belong to either Maritxu or Begoña because, from Maritxu’s non-omniscient narration, Maritxu has bickered with Joxian and she suspects Begoña has argued with him as well. Once the reader reaches the line “You’re the one bringing men *inna* your house,” the reader can deduce that the line belongs to Maritxu because she witnessed other men in Begoña’s apartment earlier in the story. From there, the reader can work backwards to interpret each line. As a result, it is easy for the reader to create multiple interpretations of the same dialogue that might not be possible in a story with clear dialogical markings.

One characteristic of Aramburu’s prose in “Maritxu” that is absent in “Fish of Bitterness” is that each scene is separated by the location in which it takes place. This dramatizes the story and turns Maritxu’s life into a Shakespearean tragedy: her son is incarcerated for nearly thirty years, her relationship with him is damaged, and the culprit is a ghost who is revealed to be

someone close to her. I have carefully maintained the formatting of this story and of “Fish of Bitterness” as they appear in Aramburu’s publication so that the English-speaking reader may experience the text in the same way that they would the original, given that the construction of the prose is so vital to the aesthetic and emotional experience of reading the stories and interpreting and connecting with their characters and themes. Aramburu’s prose is to be celebrated, and I hope that any confusion that the reader may experience has been maintained from the original text, not added through my translation.

### Vocabulary

English and Spanish share many synonyms. However, every word carries a connotation that is unique to its own language and that does not translate unaltered when brought into another language. Consequently, translating a word often requires careful consideration of the surrounding context of the word instead of a mere dictionary referral. The following examples from “Fish of Bitterness” evidence this idea.

When the father’s daughter leaves the hospital for the first time, Andoni and he take the stairs while she and the nurses take the elevator. The men reach the ground floor through the staircase before the daughter and the nurses, to which the father reacts: “Pensé que en adelante cada uno de nosotros tendría que apañárselas para acostumbrarse a la lentitud” (14). If one were to translate this sentence literally, perhaps using an AI translator, one might yield a text like, *I thought that from now on each of us would have to manage to get used to the slowness.*

However, this translation does not capture the emotional weight of his reaction in Spanish. *Pensé* here is the preterite tense of the verb *pensar*, which means *to think* in English. When used in the preterite, though, *pensar* acquires an additional meaning: to come to a conclusion or belief after a preceding event. In other words, a stronger and more descriptive English word that fits the same



role is *to realize* because the father realizes how the pace of everyday life will change for his daughter, Andoni, and himself for the foreseeable future. This process is how I arrived at my current translation: “That’s when I realized that each one of us would have to get used to the slowness from here on out.”

Later in the story, the father discusses the difference between his daughter’s healed left and damaged right leg: “La pierna izquierda la tiene curada; en cambio, la derecha nunca podrá apoyarla...” (17). At a glance, *curada* here looks like it should mean *cured*. However, in English, a *cure* more often than not refers to the treatment of an illness or disease, not an injury. Therefore it makes most sense to consider the additional meanings of *curada* that are not cognates, including *treated* or *healed*, which are more accurate in context: “Her left leg was able to be treated; however, her right leg will never be able to support her...”

When the father recalls the times in which he and Juani spied on their daughter and Andoni to monitor their relationship, he mentions the time that he walked in on his daughter reading a magazine while Andoni was fixing the sink (27). The word that Aramburu chooses to describe the daughter’s reading is “ojeando.” This verb looks like it derives from the noun *ojo*, or *eye*, and so one would conclude that an appropriate translation would be *eyeing*. This is likely not the case. At this point in the story we know that the relationship between Andoni and the daughter is on the rocks, especially because the previous two scenes involve the daughter’s inventing excuses to disguise their arguments (25-26). Taking into account this common thread between the three scenes, this third scene should also express this sentiment in English. So, when the daughter reads the magazine, she should be doing it in such a way that she *appears* to read intensely as a front to hide her bickering with Andoni. If she is *eyeing* a magazine, though, that means she is reading it with interest. *Glancing*, therefore, portrays the image that I would like to

communicate to the reader. This case, like those before it, exemplifies the intimate knowledge of the original and target language that a translator requires to recreate and express an intentional message or idea to the reader.

### Metaphors and Idiomatic Expressions

Translating idiomatic expressions poses a considerable challenge, demanding a delicate balance between conveying the intended meaning and preserving the original cultural context. The intricacies lie not only in the semantic translation of individual words but also in capturing the cultural nuances and underlying metaphorical implications within the expression. Idioms are deeply embedded in the fabric of a language and reflect a culture's collective experiences, historical roots, and societal values. When translating idioms, the translator grapples with the dilemma of whether to install an equivalent expression that conveys the intended message or retain the original idiom, thus providing an opportunity for cultural exploration and cross-cultural understanding.

In one scene of "Fish of Bitterness," the father and his family sit to eat dinner after the daughter feigns sickness to avoid seeing Andoni. The father has prepared the meal and Juani complains that the pieces are too large to chew, telling him "¿o es que crees que tenemos boca de elefante?" (Aramburu 20). While a more literal translation would yield "or is it that you think we have [an] elephant's mouth?," I decided to change the *elephant's mouth* to a *bottomless pit*. The purpose of Juani's expression is to clarify her disappointment in the large size of the peppers. She sarcastically invokes the large size of an elephant's mouth, which would be more appropriately sized for the meal, to make her critique. In English, we would still understand her expression without any changes. We recognize that elephants have a large mouth. However, when we consider the most iconic qualities of an elephant, it is more common to consider its

ivory tusks, its memory (as in the saying *an elephant never forgets*), or the grand size of its entire body, not necessarily the size of its mouth as an individual factor. Comparing one's mouth or stomach to a bottomless pit is a common expression in English and one that still applies to the situation due to the pit's ability to contain such large portions. As a result, I decided to remove the image of the elephant and instead use the bottomless pit to maintain the wit of the original situation in Spanish.

One metaphor that I was happy to keep was of the daughter's legs potentially turning into rags (30). As she adapts to her new life after the attack, the daughter prefers to use her crutches instead of her wheelchair. While Juani suspects that the daughter feels shame in sitting in the wheelchair, the daughter claims that she can move around the house more freely using her crutches and that she does not want both legs, the good and the damaged, to become weak like rags. The comparison to the rag's limp nature is apparent, though the true power of the metaphor lies in its implication of poverty. Rags symbolize a poor state of wealth; in appearance in comparison to clean, well-styled clothing; or even in social status, as in Cinderella's drab clothing in the tale by the Brothers Grimm. The image of tattered rags well represents the shame that the daughter would feel by appearing publicly in her *lesser* state. With the popularity of *rags-to-riches* stories in America dating back to as early as the nineteenth century (Naveh 60), It makes sense to keep this metaphor in the English translation.

In "Maritxu," Joxian's girlfriend Begoña asks Maritxu not to tell Joxian about the doll pranks (Aramburu 68). A literal translation of Maritxu's response, "Yo como una tumba," would read "I, like a tomb." This idiom can make sense in English because we recognize similar qualities in a tomb: its stillness, silence, and concealment of a grim truth. However, the English

idiom *my lips are sealed* serves the same purpose and holds colloquial usage, which makes it a better fit for the scenario.

Soon afterward, Maritxu sits at the living room table and debates telling Joxian about Begoña's disapproved party life. She does this by speaking to the cracked portrait of her deceased husband, saying to him: "En vida eras más callado que un armario" (70). Literally, this would mean "In life you were more silent than a closet." This simile is a work of genius because *callado* can mean *shut-up*, which applies to both the shutting of one's mouth and the shutting of a closet door. Unfortunately though, it does not translate quite as well into English. I opted to replace this idiom with a more common one in English: "In life you were quieter than a mouse." I lament that it is not as witty as the Spanish phrase, but this English phrase would flow from the mouth as readily and naturally as the Spanish one.

In the final scene of "Maritxu," Maritxu and Begoña argue about which of them has ruined their relationship with Joxian, Maritxu as his mother and Begoña as his girlfriend. Begoña asserts that Maritxu's argument with him has put him in a "depresión de caballo" (75). This translates as a "horse's depression," or a depression that is profound. While we do not have a literal equivalent for this idiom in English, *feeling down in the dumps* is quite similar and serves the same purpose, which makes it a clear fit. Yet the most difficult idiom to replace is in the aforementioned argument between Maritxu and Joxian in the visiting room. At that moment, she tells Joxian that one of his fellow activists has been relieved of punishment and given a job by the Basque government. This is clearly in bad taste in the face of Joxian's twenty-eight-year sentence, and so he coldly replies "con su pan se lo coma" (74). This expression literally means "let him/her eat it with his/her bread," but in English we would more readily understand it as *good for him/her* with a great affect of jealousy or anger. Although the English expression's

meaning aligns almost perfectly with the Spanish meaning, the imagery of the Spanish expression is highly proverbial. One can romanticize a biblical fable, a grudge that has withstood multiple generations of family, or a bitter hatred dating back to when brown bread was less desirable, but affordable enough for a peasant to enjoy as a meal alongside their jealousy. I lament losing this imagery in favor of the English expression that can be sighed with an eye roll before moving on to the next topic, but I truly believe that *good for him* serves as a sufficient replacement. It is a cold, brief statement that shows Joxian wants to change the topic and leave his mother and that serves as a fitting end to their relationship and the story.

## Conclusions

My translations of “Fish of Bitterness” and “Maritxu” required a combination of literary and historical research, creativity, and understanding and authority regarding the power of the written word. A series of conscientious decisions in word choice and portrayals allow the English-speaking reader to experience ideas, images, and interpretations that are similar to the ones available in Aramburu’s original writing. The translations adhere to and defy conventions with complete knowledge and in similar fashion to the source text. Lastly, the translation presents the Basque culture and language in such a manner that gains relevancy for the English-speaking reader. Readers can leave the text having acquired new information, opinions, and ideally new perspectives on the Basque people, the history of the world and the lives of those around them, all of which they may continue to develop and share with others. Taking all of these points into consideration, it follows that “Fish of Bitterness” and “Maritxu” are *faithful* translations.

The importance of Aramburu’s stories is evident in their portrayal of human tragedy, decisions and emotions. The ideas of conflict and unrest resonate in societies across cultures, since countless have stories that have yet to be told. In the end, my translation has aimed to illuminate these stories and share them with many more members of the global community. Of course, my translation is just one iteration, one translator’s interpretation of a story written by another person in another language and culture. Perhaps another translator will come along and offer new perspectives on the texts to the world. “Los peces de la amargura” and “Maritxu” deserve such attention after all, as Aramburu has developed such a creative and profound contribution to a topic that is many decades in the making, its consequences rooted deeply in the lives, memories, and stories of the Basque people.

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