

# *Spanish Fiction*

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Luisgé Martín

LA MISMA CIUDAD

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**I**n the midst of a midlife crisis, Brandon Moy bumps into a long-lost friend. Since they last met, years earlier, their lives have diverged. Everything sensible, solid and routine in Moy's existence is glamorous, sexy and unpredictable in the friend's. The next day – September 11, 2001 – after his wife and son have headed out, Moy leaves late for the law firm where he works. His office is in the World Trade Center. That morning, as he watches in horror, several blocks away, his office and colleagues are destroyed. Perhaps hung-over, perhaps in shock, he approaches the scene and spends the day tending to the wounded. Eventually, he tries to call his wife. The phone system has collapsed. Brandon Moy realizes that, as far as the world is concerned, he is dead.

Few people get a second chance. Brandon Moy gets three, and Luisgé Martín charts the journey between the two moments in which Moy is forced to decide who he really is. He buries his former identity. The gaps he feels that marriage has left, he fills with sex, drugs, crime, travel and poetry. As well as the American setting, the ups and downs of our protagonist recall comparable arcs in the novels of Paul Auster and Philip Roth. The forty-something white guy realizing that he has wasted his life is a staple of US fiction. And Don DeLillo and Jonathan Safran Foer, to name just two, have fictionalized the September 11 attacks.

Much recent fiction in Spanish is grand in scale and wilfully digressive. Martín's work crosses three continents and sees our protagonist carry out muggings, commit fraud and have sex with an unknown man in a vacant apartment. But the plot is compressed and the prose tight. The narration is gently self-aware, like a modern twice-told tale. In Madrid, pursuing one of a string of beautiful, passionate girlfriends, Moy recounts to the narrator the scarcely believable life of Albert Tracey, his assumed name during this ten-year sabbatical. Perhaps the strangest twist of all is its ending. In his sixth novel, Martín has delivered a clever and pacy modern fable.

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