

Transfiction

Characters in Search of Translation Studies

Edited by

Marko Miletich

SUNY Buffalo State University

Series in Literary Studies



VERNON PRESS

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www.vernonpress.com

In the Americas:
Vernon Press
1000 N West Street, Suite 1200
Wilmington, Delaware, 19801
United States

In the rest of the world:
Vernon Press
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,
Malaga, 29006
Spain

Series in Literary Studies

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023946585

ISBN: 978-1-64889-790-0

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List of Acronyms

AIIC	Association International des Interprètes de Conférence
EEAS	European External Action Service
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service
NAJIT	National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators
NeMLA	Northeast Modern Language Association
OCR	Optical Character Recognition

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Acknowledgments

The inspiration for this book originated during a panel on transfiction at the 2022 Northeast Modern Language Association (NeMLA) in Baltimore, Maryland. I would like to thank NeMLA for their continuous inclusion of topics related to translation studies.

Editing a book is harder than I thought and more rewarding than I could have ever imagined. This volume would not have been possible without the help and support of several people. I am extremely grateful for their assistance and encouragement.

I would like to thank my friend and colleague, Dr. José Dávila Montes, for his support and advice for this project (and throughout my career). I would like to thank my colleague at Buffalo State University (SUNY), Dr. Mark Warford, for his insightful comments and positive feedback. I would also like to thank Dr. Erin Riddle for her careful editing and expertise.

I am eternally grateful to my former thesis director, mentor, and friend, Dr. Carrol Coates, who taught me to persevere in times of difficulty and how to read carefully. Unknowingly, he contributed to the planning and conceptualization of this volume long before the project was initiated.

I would like to thank the authors for contributing to this volume, a truly international group: Irem Ayan, Caragh Barry, Marella Feltrin-Morris, Sheela Mahadevan, and Yan Wu. They kept to the strict deadlines and worked diligently to write, submit, and revise their chapters. Thank you for sharing your expertise and providing a great service to our field.

Finally, on behalf of all my colleagues, I would especially like to express my gratitude to the publishing company, Vernon Press, for giving us the opportunity to publish this volume. Special thanks to the editor at Vernon Press, Blanca Caro Durán, who patiently answered all my questions and addressed my concerns through many online meetings. This book would not have been possible without her expert guidance through the publishing process.

Introduction

Marko Miletich

SUNY Buffalo State University

As it is with a play, so it is with life — what matters is not
how long the acting lasts, but how good it is.

Seneca

Fiction is a lie. Transfiction is a double lie.

The short stories and novels we read are not real. We are aware of this fact, and yet, we “like reading fiction because it lets us try on different mental states and seems to provide intimate access to the thoughts, intentions, and feelings of other people in our social environment” (Zunshine, 2006, p. 25). Fiction (re)creates a world readers can visit with the help of the words in a text and their imagination. The tales we read often include people living in worlds similar to their human counterparts. These putative beings serve as stand-ins for our everyday flesh-and-blood lives and psychological conundrums. Sometimes, these fabricated beings (re)present predetermined social norms and expectations for certain professions (such as doctors, teachers, writers, and, in our case, translators and interpreters). Such fictional characters often provide insights into the experiences of such professionals and the worlds they inhabit.

Transfiction—a term used to describe the portrayal of translation (as both a topic and a motif) as well as translators and interpreters in fiction and film—is also a lie.¹ Those depictions are not true; they are immersed in an imaginary literary existence. Fictional translations utilized in short stories and novels

¹ The term *Transfiction* has also been used to define a mixed-reality system where users can be transported into fictional spaces via virtual reality through the user's appearance or its avatar. *Transfictionality* is also currently used to describe the transfer of an established literary character into a new fiction that differs from the original fiction. *Trans Fiction* (two separate words) is applied to the literary production that addresses, has been written by, or portrays people of diverse gender identities. Throughout this volume, the term *Transfiction* will refer to the use of translation and translators/interpreters in fiction. *Transfictional* is the adjective used to describe these types of stories.

never really existed, and neither do the imagined language professionals who reside in these fictitious stories. However, fantastical characters do face situations and challenges that serve to represent the everyday lives and mental states of their real live counterparts. Transfiction also serves as an invaluable pedagogical tool for discussing the intricate world of translation studies and its many sub-areas. Several translation scholars (Arrojo, 2018 & Kaindl, 2014, among others referenced in this volume) have discussed the benefits of using fiction as a teaching tool for translator and interpreter training. These transfictional tales can be utilized to introduce translation theories, examine sociological aspects of translation (expectations of the translator/interpreter, their positionality within a particular society, and ideological, political, and social areas of conflict), and discuss translatorial behavior and strategies (Kaindl, 2018, p. 164).

Translation has often been viewed as a derivative activity (an act of simple reproduction), while the writing of originals is considered to be a creative activity (a unique production) (Chamberlain, 1988). Translators, therefore, have been seen as servile, often nameless scribes who become invisible as they (re)write the words of another. Contemporary fictional translators and interpreters, however, are no longer seen as “mere interlingual photocopiers, but [as] beings that live and operate in complex sociocultural contexts” (Miletich, 2018, p. 175). Fictional texts that include translators and interpreters as characters “represent a discursive vehicle for highlighting the presence rather than the absence of the translator” (Wilson, 2007, p. 393).

Certainly, ideas regarding translation as mere transference of static meaning and once expressed in musical terms (as echoes), painting terms (as copies or portraits), or as sartorial terms (as borrowed or ill-fitting clothing) have been mostly defunct for some time; however, followers of traditional views of translation still cling to the idea of the translator/interpreter as a secondary and invisible being who should not intervene in any considerable way. Modern scholarship, nevertheless, “requires that we bring the translator [and the interpreter] as a social being fully into the picture” (Hermans, 1996, p. 26). The transformation of a statement or a text from one language to another through the mediating actions of an interpreter or translator leaves evidence of an unavoidable existence. All acts of translation and interpreting require intervention. The translator/interpreter’s presence and intervention are inevitable (both in translations and interpreter-mediated events), as the chapters herein amply demonstrate.

Over the last few decades, there has been a considerable increase in the presence of translation as a topic and motif, including translators and interpreters as protagonists in literature and film. The reason for this surge, notes Klaus Kaindl (2014), is that “literature and film are never detached from

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