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Traduttore Traditore: How the "Unfaithful" Illuminate Translation and Interpreting Studies

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Abstract. This article examines deviant practices found in fictional portrayals of translators and interpreters. The diverse manifestations of misconduct shown here help to illuminate the moral complexities inherent in linguistic mediation, thus revealing a typology of professional misconduct that ranges from textual appropriation, in which translators systematically diminish source material through selective omission, to complete textual substitution, wherein practitioners replace entire works with original compositions while maintaining the pretense of translation. Additional categories include gradual authorial usurpation through excessive annotation, deliberate misinterpretation in life-threatening situations, competitive manipulation of interpretive accuracy for personal gain, fabrication of source texts to claim dual authorship, and vindictive narrative modification targeting specific characters. These fictional portrayals serve as critical examinations of the power dynamics in translation and interpretation practice, highlighting tensions between fidelity, creativity, personal ethics, and professional responsibility. The findings demonstrate how literary fiction functions as a site for exploring the boundaries of professional conduct in translation studies, and reveal the complex negotiations between accuracy and adaptation, neutrality and intervention, and service and self-interest that characterize the translator/interpreter's role as cultural intermediary. This typology contributes to understanding the ethical frameworks governing translation and interpretation, and illustrates how fictional narratives can clarify real-world professional dilemmas in cross-linguistic communication.
Keywords. authorship, ethics, intervention, (in)visibility, transfiction.

Traduttore Traditore: Cómo los "infieles" arrojan luz sobre los Estudios de Traducción e Interpretación

Resumen. El presente artículo investiga las conductas anómalas que se manifiestan en las representaciones ficticias de traductores e intérpretes. Las diversas manifestaciones de conducta indebida mostradas aquí sirven para iluminar las complejidades morales inherentes a la mediación lingüística. El análisis revela una tipología de mala conducta profesional que va desde la apropiación textual, donde los traductores disminuyen sistemáticamente el material original mediante la omisión selectiva, hasta la sustitución textual completa, en la que los profesionales reemplazan obras enteras con composiciones originales manteniendo la pretensión de traducción. Categorías adicionales incluyen la paulatina usurpación autorial a través de la anotación excesiva, la interpretación errónea deliberada en situaciones de riesgo vital, la manipulación competitiva de la precisión interpretativa para beneficio personal, la fabricación de textos fuente para reclamar doble autoría, y la modificación narrativa vengativa dirigida a personajes específicos. Estas representaciones ficticias sirven como exámenes críticos de dinámicas de poder incrustadas en la práctica de la traducción y la interpretación, destacando las tensiones entre fidelidad, creatividad, ética personal y responsabilidad profesional. Los hallazgos demuestran cómo la ficción literaria funciona como un espacio para explorar los límites de la conducta profesional en los estudios de traducción, revelando las complejas negociaciones entre precisión y adaptación, neutralidad e intervención, y servicio e interés propio que caracterizan el papel del traductor/intérprete como intermediario cultural. Esta tipología contribuye a comprender los marcos

éticos que rigen la traducción y la interpretación, al tiempo que ilustra cómo las narraciones ficticias pueden iluminar dilemas profesionales del mundo real en la comunicación translingüística.
Palabras clave: autoría, ética, intervención, (in)visibilidad, transficción.

What are you going to do about the places we didn't understand?
Oh, I'll do something—no matter who I ask, there's probably no one who would understand it completely. And anyway, there's no time, so it can't be helped." Terao took it for granted that his livelihood was a far more important concern than any mistranslation.
Soseki Natsume[1]

1. Introduction

Fictional translators and interpreters are an untrustworthy lot. Traditional typologies for classifying translators and interpreters frequently employ pejorative terminology, including characterizations such as *traitor, nitpicker, traducer, hopeless* or *uprooted wanderer* (Kaindl 2014: 17). The fact that one of the patrons of translators and interpreters is Hermes (Mercury for the Romans) who in addition to other attributes is the god of thieves, speaks volumes[2]. While Hermes is not specifically the "god of translators", his role as the messenger of the gods, a skilled communicator, and an interpreter of secret messages significantly influenced his association with language, translation, and interpretation. Translation/interpreting mirrors thievery in its artful appropriation: translators, like skilled thieves, must "extract" meaning from one language and smuggle it into another, transforming its form while preserving its meaning. Most translations/interpreting, like the most cunning thefts, leave no fingerprints; the message appears to have originated naturally in its new linguistic home. Translation/interpreting demands the same stealth and ingenuity that defined Hermes' legendary exploits. The notion of "Hermaean thievery" is further amplified when the translator or interpreter engages in intentional unfaithfulness.

"Infidelity", which refers to a breach of loyalty or betrayal in relationships, has historically been closely associated with translation and *interpreting*. In translation studies, "infidelity" means departing from or inaccurately representing the original source material. Traditionally, a translation is considered faithful if it closely mirrors the original text, typically through either a strict literal interpretation of meaning or by effectively capturing the "spirit" of the source material (Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997: 57)

This connection between infidelity and translation has been extensively examined by scholars, particularly Lori Chamberlain in her seminal 1988 work *Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation.* In her essay, she discusses the prevailing tendency to anthropomorphize translation by attributing human traits and moral judgments to the practice. Just as we understand human infidelity, which is a breach against an original bond, unfaithful translation, in a similar vein, is viewed as an act of treachery against a source text, betraying presupposed fidelity and integrity.

Building upon the concept of infidelity, the Italian proverb *Traduttore, traditore* ['Translator, traitor'] perfectly encapsulates the concept of infidelity in translation/interpreting. This wordplay suggests that when translators stray from the source text, they betray the original author, the intended meaning, and even the source language itself. Such "betrayal" evokes the same emotional weight as infidelity in personal relationships. Just as infidelity between individuals represents a breach of trust, loyalty, and established expectations, deviation from the source text/language is viewed as a violation of integrity and fidelity in translation.

In matters of integrity and fidelity, translation/interpreting operates within an implicit contract: readers trust translators/interpreters to faithfully convey meaning across linguistic boundaries. When translators/interpreters take significant liberties with the source material, they violate the established expectations and compromise the foundation of this trust. When such departures are deliberate and self-serving, the translator's/interpreter's intervention becomes particularly problematic, prioritizing their own agenda over representation of the original work.

This article investigates fictional translators and interpreters known for their unfaithfulness to determine what insights these characters offer about important issues in translation and interpreting studies. As Rosemary Arrojo (2018: 1) notes, fictional works exploring translation provide richer insights into the field by depicting translator characters grappling with professional struggles and ethical dilemmas while illuminating their complex relationships with authors and readers. The expanding academic focus on fictional portrayals of translation, interpreting, and language professionals has generated an emerging area within translation and interpreting studies known as transfiction. This specialized area of inquiry rigorously examines the role of translation, translators, and interpreters in fictional contexts, delving into both the theoretical underpinnings and the practical processes of translation itself. More broadly, transfiction encompasses fictional works that integrate translation or translators/interpreters as integral components of their narratives, meticulously

1 A discussion between two characters regarding the translation of a passage in Soseki Natsume's novel, *And Then* (2011).

2 Hermes is recognized as the patron god of merchants, travelers, and thieves. He is considered the god of thieves due to his cleverness, his ability to deceive, and his youthful act of stealing Apollo's cattle. In addition, the term *hermeneutics* connects to Hermes, the messenger god who conveyed divine messages to mortals. Like Hermes bridging the divine and human realms, hermeneutics seeks to uncover and convey meaning from texts, contexts, and cultural artifacts through skilled interpretation. St. Jerome, revered as the patron saint of translators, particularly within Christianity, is associated with a rigorous and scholarly approach to translation. His patronage is rooted in his monumental work of translating the Bible into Latin, known as the Vulgate.

scrutinizing the depiction of translation in literature and film, analyzing the portrayal of translators, the challenges they encounter, and the ultimate impact of their work on the storyline (Kaindl 2014: 1-26). Essentially, transfiction serves to represent and investigate how translation, translators, and interpreters are presented within literary and cinematic contexts. This approach offers translation and interpreting studies a distinctive way to explore complex topics such as translation, authorship, and reading, through the lens of fictional characters grappling with professional conflicts and ethical challenges.

This study focuses on four main topics: intervention, (in)visibility, ethics, and authorship. For the sake of clarity, each narrative examined has been categorized under one of these four topics. Several narratives, however, could plausibly be interpreted through multiple categories and I will note intersections that reveal thematic overlaps. Other aspects of translation and interpreting, such as the translation process, working conditions, and specialized fields, could also be explored through fictional narratives, but these topics fall outside the scope of this study. While many other literary works could be analyzed, only a few notable examples were selected. The provided literary corpus is selected for academic inquiry because these texts "illuminate" critical theoretical debates by questioning the traditional, often marginalized, role of the linguistic mediator. Collectively, these works move beyond the technical mechanics of translation and interpreting to explore the translator's visibility, agency, and ethical boundaries. This selection is strategically designed to challenge the myth of the perfect or transparent translation, a concept notably subverted in Dezső Kosztolányi's *Kornél Esti.* Furthermore, the works of Rodolfo Walsh and Moacyr Scliar provide a framework for scholars to examine the physical and textual space (specifically the paratext) that a translator occupies. The narratives of Italo Calvino, José María Merino, Carlos Fuentes, and Arthur Conan Doyle serve to explore the complex moral and ethical responsibilities inherent in linguistic mediation. Ultimately, these texts reveal the translator as a subversive authorial figure who may intentionally invent a source text to gain authorship, as exemplified in Barbara Wilson's *Mi novelista*.

2. Intervention

Translation and interpreting involve transformative interventions between languages, converting and reshaping written text or spoken words to transfer meaning. Interventions beyond linguistic adjustments are often viewed suspiciously, as they contradict expectations of translators as objective message conveyors. Translators are "expected to respect the hierarchy that places them under the authority of the author and to remain invisible, repressing any authorial desire that may produce visible signs of their interventions in the texts of others" (Van-Wyke 2013: 548). In fiction, overt and explicit interventions typically serve specific needs or economic/personal gain.

Chapter XIV in Dezső Kosztolányi's novel *Kornél Esti* explores a specific instance of translator intervention through the character of Gallus, who blatantly subtracts from the text. Gallus, despite being highly educated and fluent in multiple languages, including English, is a kleptomaniac who steals for pleasure. After being imprisoned, he seeks employment help from the narrator, who recommends him as a translator to a publisher. Initially, his translation appears excellent: "There wasn't a single mistranslation..." (Kosztolányi 2011: 201)[3]. A closer examination reveals significant discrepancies: money and valuable items have been either removed or replaced with less valuable objects in the translated text. A scene featuring a countess was well translated overall, but missing "were the diamond tiara, the pearl necklace, the diamond sapphire, and emerald ring" (p. 202). The translator also "frequently substituted worthless and inferior material for noble metals and precious stones" (p. 203), replacing "platinum with tin plate, gold with brass, and diamonds with quartz crystals or glass" (p. 203).

The narrative highlights the critical role of norms in shaping translator behavior. As Theo Hermans (1996) reveals, these norms encompass both the societal expectations concerning a translator's conduct in a given situation and the prescriptive guidelines for how they "ought to behave" (1996: 30). Hermans further clarifies that norms suggest a preferred course of action among various options, which is accepted by the community as "proper", "correct," or "appropriate" (1996: 30). This shared understanding of what is "correct" forms the essence of a norm. The kleptomaniac translator clearly violates conventional translation norms, which require complete and faithful representation of the source text. These violations directly contradict Gideon Toury's concept of "operational norms," which govern the "relationship between target and source text" (1995: 58) by determining "what is more likely to remain invariant under transformation and what will change" (1995: 58). The translator's thefts represent a complete breakdown of these operational standards.

The character of Gallus represents an extreme manifestation of translator intervention, wherein his compulsive behavior, described as his "sinful passion or sickness", fundamentally alters the source text in ways that directly impact both narrative content and perceived value. Gallus emerges as an active, although deeply problematic, agent in the meaning-making process, forcing readers to confront the reality that translation always involves human intervention and subjective decision-making. For Rosemary Arrojo, the story also connects to a "widespread notions about translation ingrained in essentialist conceptions of language and the subject" (2018: 103). Through his interventions, Gallus has altered the sacrosanct essentialist notion of "stable meanings stored in texts, such meanings are not only considered to be objectively traceable to their authors' conscious intentions but also viewed as their property" (Arrojo 2018: 103).

Kosztolányi (2011) uses Gallus's kleptomania as a sophisticated metaphor for translation ethics, literalizing "theft" to expose the tensions between creativity and fidelity inherent in all translation work. What distinguishes

3 Henceforth numbers enclosed in parentheses will refer to page numbers within the story examined.

Gallus is not intervention itself, but his conscious, systematic manipulation of texts. His compulsive alterations exemplify translation's subjective nature, challenging norms of faithful representation and revealing that translation is never purely objective, but rather a dynamic process shaped by the translator's agency and professional standards.

Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979) demonstrates intervention in translation through the character of Ermes Marana, a translator who serves as the central figure in the novel's metafictional structure. Metafiction "can be defined as a way of writing, or more precisely as a way of consciously manipulating fictional structures, of playing games with fiction" (Onega & García-Olanda 2014: 31), which Calvino achieves through direct address to the reader and a framing narrative of perpetually interrupted stories. Marana, whose first name (Ermes) evokes Hermes, functions beyond linguistic intermediary as a deliberate manipulator. Portrayed as a mysterious "swindler" and "mythomane translator", he orchestrates the misplacement of original works and translations, creating the novel's fragmented texts while making the reading experience itself the narrative subject.

Marana's role extends beyond individual deception through his associations with subversive organizations: the Apocryphal Power, which he founded, and the Organization for the Electronics Production of Homogenized Literary Works (p. 122) for which he acts as a representative. His ultimate ambition is a "literature made entirely of apocrypha, of false attributions, of imitations and counterfeits and pastiches" (p. 159). Within translation studies, Marana exemplifies a radical challenge to traditional norms of textual authenticity and authorial control. The novel's alternating structure, which interweaves numbered chapters about the "Reader's" search for a complete novel with unnumbered chapters of incomplete stories, moves beyond linguistic transfer to examine power dynamics in how texts are created and received.

Calvino subverts the norm of consistent authorial voice by constantly shifting narratives and introducing unrealized 'authors'. Marana's actions violate the "translation policy norm", which "refers to those factors that govern the choice of text types, or even individual texts, to be imported through translation into a particular culture/language at a particular point in time" (Toury 1995: 58). Marana usurps this selection process by continuously switching books, further violating narrative norms as each interrupted chapter deprives readers of linear plot, character development, and resolved endings.

Gallus and Ermes Marana powerfully demonstrate the complex interplay of norms and intervention in translation studies. Gallus, a kleptomaniac, defies conventional translation norms by systematically altering source texts for personal gain, challenging fidelity expectations. His "theft" metaphorically highlights tensions between creativity and faithfulness, underscoring translation as a dynamic, agency-driven process. Similarly, Marana, Calvino's "mythomane translator", manipulates texts and subverts norms of authorship, readership, and narrative. His actions, driven by personal desire and subversive affiliations, expose inherent power dynamics and choices beyond linguistic accuracy. Through extreme interventions, both characters force a re-evaluation of translation as a non-objective transfer, emphasizing its profound impact by human agency, subjective decisions, and norms.

3. (In)Visibility

The translator has traditionally been viewed as an invisible entity; a subservient text reproducer serving both author and source text. This paradigm positions translators as transparent conduits whose ideal function is conveying source messages without leaving traces of intervention. Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995) challenged this view, arguing that translator invisibility is enforced by translation marketing, reading, and evaluation practices, compounded by translation's ambiguous legal status. Additionally, this invisibility results from "domesticating" strategies that prioritize idiomatic target texts while erasing foreignness (Venuti 1995: 1-10 and sic passim).

Two Latin American short stories, *Notas ao pé da página* ['Footnotes'] by Moacyr Scliar (1995) and *Nota al pie* ['Footnote'] by Rodolfo Walsh (1985), illustrate how footnotes can generate unusual translator visibility. Unlike typical translator footnotes that provide minimal commentary or supplementary information in small print at page bottoms, these stories use annotations strategically to amplify the translator's presence and undermine the author's control.

Moacyr Scliar's *Notas ao pé da página* is a five-page short story uniquely structured with footnotes as the sole visible text (a notable absence of textual content is observed in the blank space situated above the footnotes on the page), subverting the traditional hierarchy of main text and paratext. As Rosemary Arrojo reminds us "the translator certainly misuses (and virtually abuses) the space that is conventionally given to him at the bottom of his translation of someone else's text" (2005: 83-84).

The narrative, entirely comprising five first-person footnotes, alludes to an "invisible" diary of a deceased poet. An unnamed translator, noted for his distinguished reputation, chronicles his interactions with the unseen poet. This confident and assertive translator-narrator disregards traditional boundaries, engaging with the poet's mistress and challenging conventional author-translator relationships. The poet further abdicates his authority within a relationship, offering his lover, referred to as N., to the translator: "Anunciou-me que N. estaria à minha inteira disposição (p. 372) ['He announced that N. would be entirely at my disposal'].[4]

At another juncture, a visually and physically manifest reversal of authorial and translational positions occurs. The poet's profound shift in demeanor is captured in the lines: "Nesse momento mudou por completo; praticamente arrojando-se a meus pés submissão abjeta implorou-me que continuasse sendo seu tradutor"

[4] All English translations from the Portuguese are my own unless otherwise indicated.

(p. 375) ['At that moment he changed completely, practically throwing himself at my feet miserably submissive he begged me to continue being his translator']. This dramatic act signifies the poet's relinquishing of authority and his plea for the translator's continued involvement, highlighting a shift in power dynamics, physically becoming a (less visible) human footnote to the translator.

By the story's conclusion, the poet/author appears to endorse the translator's actions that rendered him invisible through the annotations. This acceptance is articulated in his final statement: "Antes de nos separarmos, olhou-me fixo, e disse: gosto até de suas notas ao pé da página" (p. 375). ['Before we left, he looked at me straight in the eye and said: I even like your footnotes']. This acceptance signifies that the author no longer holds the position of primary authority, accepting a subordinate role previously occupied by the translator. The narrative thus "signals a transgression of hierarchies and limits" (Oliveira 2017: 83), illustrating how the translator actively disrupts a conventional ranking system (author first/visible, translator second/invisible) to challenge traditional boundaries between text and paratext.

Rodolfo Walsh's *Nota al pie* follows editor Otero investigating his deceased translator León de Sanctis's suicide at a boarding house. The 27-page story employs dual narratives: a third-person account of León's death and madness, and an expanding first-person footnote marked by asterisks and italics. This footnote progressively overtakes the main text, eventually consuming entire pages while detailing León's alienation from his work. Like Scliar's story, the escalating footnotes subvert conventional textual hierarchy, with the translator usurping authorial space as an act of visual defiance.

The translator is initially invisible, literally dead and covered by a bedsheet. Reflecting the traditional notion of translator subservience, León initially views his role as one of self-effacement, stating he had to, "borrar su personalidad, pasar inadvertido, escribir como otro y que nadie lo note*"* (p. 425) ['Erase his personality, to go unnoticed, to write as another person and have no one notice'][5]. This explicitly demonstrates his initial embrace of translator invisibility.

As the narrative progresses, however, León's desire for visibility intensifies. This shift is evident when he observes the printing of his first translation, marking a significant moment of self-recognition: "... mi primera obra, quiero decir mi primera traducción" (p. 441) ['... my first work, I mean my first translation']. This prompts León to begin conceiving of himself as an author. His burgeoning authorial aspirations culminate in a deliberate act of invention within a translation: "Un día extravié medio pliego de una novela de Asimov. ¿Sabe lo que hice? Lo inventé de pies a cabeza. Nadie se dio cuenta. A raíz de eso fantaseé que yo mismo podía escribir" (p. 446) ['One day I lost half a page of a novel by Asimov. You know what I did? I made it up from top to bottom. Nobody realized it. As a result, I fantasized that I, myself, could write'].

Walsh's story, therefore, "constitutes a space for reflection on the practice of translation and on the translator's (in)visibility, a reflection that is also an eloquent form of activism" (Arrojo 2018: 44). *Nota al pie* articulates the profound desire for a translator to achieve visibility, even by inventing text or by occupying a space traditionally reserved for the author, ultimately displacing the authorial voice to gain prominence through footnotes.

Moacyr Scliar's *Notas ao pé da página* and Rodolfo Walsh's *Nota al pie* powerfully demonstrate how footnotes can be transformed from peripheral paratextual elements into central narrative devices, thereby challenging traditional hierarchies of text and authorship. In both stories, the translators (Scliar's unnamed narrator and Walsh's León de Sanctis) amplify their conventional roles by expanding footnotes to dominate the main text. This "unfaithfulness" to established textual conventions highlights the inherent power dynamics in translation and illustrates how translators can assert authority and even usurp the domain traditionally reserved for authors. Ultimately, these narratives compel readers to reconsider the translator's role not merely as a conduit of information, but as an active visible agent capable of significant textual intervention and re-authorship.

4. Ethics

Ethics represents a critical topic within translation studies, particularly concerning professional practices. In the United States, prominent organizations such as the American Translators Association (ATA), the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT), and the International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA) have established clearly defined Codes of Ethics. Professional codes of ethics consistently emphasize impartiality, neutrality, accuracy, and fidelity; these values remain central across various fields, including medical, judicial, and literary translation, as well as sign language and conference interpreting (Inghilleri & Maier 2009: 102). The following two stories demonstrate how interpreters can violate these ethical standards, outlined in these organizational codes.

The Greek Interpreter, (1893 [2012]) a Sherlock Holmes story, involves Sherlock, his brother Mycroft, and Mr. Melas, a Greek interpreter. Melas is abducted and forced to interpret for criminals who are holding Paul Kratides and his sister Sophy captive. Melas surreptitiously gathers information, discovering that kidnappers Latimer and Kemp are coercing Sophy and Paul to sign over Sophy's inheritance. Melas informs Mycroft, who then alerts Sherlock. Mycroft and Holmes successfully locate the secret house. Although they rescue Sophy, they arrive too late to save Paul, who has been killed by his captors. The kidnappers escape but are later found dead in Hungary, presumably at Sophy's hand, though this is not explicitly stated.

The ethical complexities presented in *The Greek Interpreter* are directly applicable to the field of interpreting. Mr. Melas, the interpreter, faces a predicament where his professional obligation to interpret

5 All English translations from the Spanish are my own unless otherwise indicated.

faithfully (as established by codes of ethics for the profession) directly conflicts with his moral obligations. This ethical challenge is underscored by a kidnapper's death threat, stating, "say no more than you are told to say" (p. 170). This directive explicitly relates to the Code of Ethics concerning accuracy, which stipulates that interpreters should not omit, add, or explain content (as exemplified by the NAJIT Code of Ethics 2025).

Melas, however, demonstrably violates this ethical standard of accuracy through his additions during interpretation, such as the added question as he interprets (which appears in italics), "You can do no good by this obstinacy. *Who are you?"* (p. 171). Furthermore, he omits interpreting responses, as seen in the uninterpreted phrase Melas adds in response to the subterfuge question "*Where are you from?"* (again, in italics) (p. 172). "Then I shall never see her. *Athens"* (p. 172). Beyond accuracy, Melas's decision to recount the events to Sherlock and Mycroft (pp. 162-176), rather than maintaining silence, constitutes an ethical choice that breaches the principle of confidentiality. This principle dictates that information obtained during an interpreting session should not be disclosed by the interpreter, a rule Melas disregards due to his belief that the individual for whom he interpreted was in mortal danger.

The Greek Interpreter reveals ethical challenges in translation and interpreting, as it highlights conflicts between professional obligations and moral duties while testing translator neutrality. His departures from strict interpretation illustrate complex decisions when lives and justice are at stake. As Uldis Ozolins notes, "the nature and purpose of interaction and interlocutor" (2015: 334) require careful consideration. These ethical challenges align with established professional codes, affecting accountability, working conditions, and specialized fields. The story shows that interpreting is rarely neutral but deeply embedded in complex social and power relations.

Carlos Fuentes' *The Two Shores* ['Las dos orillas'] from *The Orange Tree* ['El naranjo'] (1994) features two competing escort interpreters during the Spanish conquest. Set in the sixteenth century, the story fictionalizes Jerónimo de Aguilar and Malinche (Malintzin/Doña Marina), interpreters for conquistador Hernán Cortés. Aguilar, a Spanish castaway who learned Mayan during captivity in Yucatán, narrates posthumously. Malinche, an indigenous woman fluent in Nahuatl and Mayan after being sold into slavery, becomes Cortés' concubine and spy. Initially, Cortés communicated through relay interpreting: Malinche translated Nahuatl to Maya, then Aguilar translated Maya to Spanish. Once Malinche learned Spanish, she communicated directly with Cortés, displacing Aguilar and breaking his linguistic monopoly. The central conflict of this historical fiction involves their struggle for control over language, as both manipulate translations to serve their own purposes.

Aguilar openly admits to his deceptive practices, stating, "I translated as I pleased, I didn't communicate to the conquered prince what Cortés really said but put into the mouth of our leader a threat" (p. 10). His inaccurate interpretations "were directed towards the goal: the triumph of the Indians over the Spaniards" (p. 19). As Malinche acquires Spanish, Jerónimo acknowledges his diminishing utility, remarking that he "was no longer needed" (p. 24). Furthermore, Cortés's relationship with Marina extended beyond that of an interpreter, as he "listened to Marina not only as an interpreter but as a lover" (pp. 21-22). The divergent objectives of the two interpreters are evident: Malinche sought to aid the European conquistadors, while Aguilar aimed for the defeat of the Spaniards. An illustrative passage highlights their opposing agendas: "'There is no danger,' I said to Cortés, knowing there was danger. 'There is danger,' Marina said to Cortés, knowing there was none" (p. 28). This excerpt clearly demonstrates the conflicting motives of these two interpreters.

Interpreters' codes of ethics mandate that interpretations "must be complete and contain no additions, omissions or distortions of meaning (misinterpretations)" (Stern 2011: 334). Fuentes' story highlights Aguilar and Malinche's transgression of this fundamental ethical principle, demonstrating a failure to uphold neutrality and impartiality, as "there should be no distortion of the original message" (Cannon 1 Accuracy, NAJIT 2025). However, as Ilse Logie points out, interpreting is not simply an instrumental rendering; it can become "an active and performative tool for resistance" (2005: 43). The interpreter is thus recognized as an active participant who may take sides for political reasons (Logie 2005: 43). Additionally, as Denise Kripper reminds us: "By foregrounding Aguilar's narrative and translational transgressions, Fuente's utopian writing-back prompts rethinking of the colonial legacy that recognizes the nuances and complexities of the encounter and that contests its histories by considering the possibility of willful mistranslations" (2023: 37), which suggests that apparent ethical misconduct may represent acts of empowerment and defiance against colonial oppression.

The two stories discussed in this section collectively highlight the multifaceted ethical landscape of interpreting. While professional codes emphasize accuracy and confidentiality, as seen in the violations by Mr. Melas in *The Greek Interpreter* and by Aguilar and Malinche in "*The Two Shores*, these instances often stem from a higher moral imperative against oppressive power dynamics. This illustrates that interpreting is seldom a neutral task but rather one situated within complex social and political frameworks, requiring ethical vigilance and comprehension of the interpreter's agency.

5. Authorship

In translation studies, the concept of authorship is complex and often contested, particularly when considering the role of the translator. Traditionally, translation has been viewed as "the poor relation of writing, often referred to as 'original' or 'creative' writing, and widely perceived as superior" (Bassnett 2006: 173). Various modern perspectives, however, challenge this traditional view, attributing a degree of authorship to the translator due to their interpretive and creative decisions during the translation process. From this viewpoint, translators can be considered writers since "translation requires an extraordinary set of literary skills, no whit inferior to the skills required to produce that text in the first instance" (Bassnett 2006: 174).

This more progressive perspective emphasizes the translator's role as a co-creator or co-author, making numerous interpretive choices that shape the target text and thereby subverting the idea of them as an invisible conduit. For instance, renowned translator Suzanne Jill Levine considered her translations of Latin American author Guillermo Cabrera Infante close collaborations or "closelaborations" (Levine 1991: xiii). In addition, many writers engage in translation, as it may be "one of several different activities undertaken by the same person" (Bassnett 2006: 174). Consequently, due to the historical emphasis on "original" writing over translation, many translators aspire to be writers.

Barbara Wilson's *Mi novelista* ['My Novelist'] (1998) (though written in English, the work employs a Spanish-language title) provides a compelling case study of a translator's authorial desires. It is part of a collection of mysteries, *The Death of a Much-Traveled Woman and Other Adventures with Cassandra Reilly*, that features a protagonist who is a lesbian translator and occasional detective. The narrative begins with a deceptively simple premise that ignites a complex chain of events. Its opening line, "Everyone wants to be a writer, I've found" (p. 195), introduces Cassandra Reilly, a translator with aspirations of becoming a writer. Unable to publish her own works, she invents a fictitious Argentinian author named Elvira Montalbán who supposedly had written a book titled *La academia de la melancolía*, which Cassandra "translates" as *The Academy of Melancholy*. Her "translation" gains considerable success until an individual, claiming to be the fabricated author, publishes the Spanish text that was allegedly the original source for Cassandra's English translation. This unexpected twist forces Cassandra to confront the consequences of her deception. This metafictional narrative becomes more intricate as the distinctions between writing and translation become blurred. As Jorge Luis Borges would say, the original is unfaithful to the translation[6].

The story presents a clear case of pseudotranslation, defined as "texts which have been presented as translations with no corresponding source texts in other languages" (Toury 1995: 40), which profoundly challenges conventional notions of authorship within translation studies. In such instances, the "translator" essentially becomes the de facto author, as there is no original author or source text to which fidelity must be maintained. This directly confronts the traditional understanding of the author as the sole creator of a work. Through pseudotranslation, the translator's interpretive authority and creative contribution are elevated, significantly blurring the lines between reproduction and original creation.

The fictional translator contemplates the nature of authorship as she explains "If what the writer writes is words, then I am a writer. I have books full of my words. But I am not a writer. Not a real one" (p. 195), questioning her own status as a writer despite possessing books "full of [her] words". This internal struggle highlights the traditional view of translators as subordinate to the original author. However, as Cassandra faces a publisher's deadline for her translation, her perception shifts; she begins to embrace the role of a writer as she "began to supposedly translate, which meant to actually write" (p. 201).

La escuela de la melancolía, purportedly the source text, is a Spanish translation of Cassandra's English work *The School of Melancholy*. Cassandra notes it "read as if it were the original Spanish" (p. 198). When she accuses the translator Elvira of plagiarism "You stole my book. You are not Elvira Montalbán. You are María Escobar" (p. 213), Elvira/María responds "You stole my life" (p. 213), suggesting Cassandra had incorporated her life experiences into the original work. This creates layered deceptions where both women have appropriated from each other.

Following a tense encounter, Cassandra and Elvira/María agree to future collaboration, with María/Elvira defining translation as "not just the art of substituting words for other words. It's a form of writing itself. What one might call—a collaboration" (p. 215). This perspective aligns with Suzanne Jill Levine's translational theories (as discussed in *The Subversive Scribe,* 1991), which advocate for the translator's active and creative role in textual production, effectively repositioning translation from a subservient act to a form of authorship.

José María Merino's Spanish short story, "The Case of the Unfaithful Translator" ['El caso del traductor infiel'] (1994), presents a comparable instance of a translator with authorial aspirations. Antonio Lugán, a professional translator in Madrid, translates a detective series by American writer Kathleen Crossfield into Spanish[7]. He occasionally writes "illuminations that sometimes came to him and that rarely developed into actual poems, but which he held onto with an inevitable sense of ownership" (p. 4). While a writer has inherent ownership of their intellectual creations, a translator produces derivative work, typically precluding such rights. Lugán "mostly made his living by translating books, and he couldn't choose them according to which ones he deemed of potential literary or cultural interest" (p. 8), accepting the translator's subordinate position.

The translator despises Kate Courage, the main character of the novels he translates, feeling "a belligerent antipathy toward the protagonist" (p. 7). The character is presented as overly perfect: a slender woman in her early thirties with honey-colored hair, bright violet eyes, and beautiful complexion. She is cultured, multilingual, from a prominent Boston family, educated at a distinguished Eastern women's college, and in excellent physical shape. Her skills include Kempo-Karate[8], shooting, fencing, horseback riding, yachting, and piloting planes, while she remains funny, vivacious, cheerful, and seductive. For the translator, Kate Courage represents "blind and self-satisfied petulance" (p. 9).

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6 *El original es infiel a la traducción*. Jorge Luis Borges argues that a translation can surpass its original in literary merit, citing Samuel Henley's translation of William Beckford's *Vathek* as a case where "the original is unfaithful to the translation" (1974: 732).

7 Several fictional translators translate detective novels or fiction. In this article Walsh's "Footnote", Wilson's *Mi novelista* and Merino's *The Case of the Unfaithful Translator*. For a detailed discussion regarding fictional translators and detective fiction see Miletich 2024.

8 Kempo Karate is a hybrid martial art that blends Chinese Kung Fu with Okinawan and Japanese influences.

The short story presents an intriguing inversion of traditional gender roles. As Marcos Eymar observes, the narrative demonstrates a reversal where the man is relegated to the passive, feminine stance typically held by a translator, while the woman assumes the active, masculine role usually associated with an author (2014: 116). This dynamic plays against the archetypal view highlighted by Lori Chamberlain, who posits that writing is perceived as an original and "masculine" endeavor while translating is considered "derivative and feminine" (1988: 455). The act of authorship, in this traditional framework, is aligned with creation and originality, thereby granting it a "masculine" identity. This established gendered perception of writing as an active and originating force underscores the significance of the novel's inversion. In addition, a strong female character, who is a detective, assumes a traditionally masculine profession and position.

Lugán begins making subtle changes to the source text when translating: "he had the idea of nuancing the scene in a grotesque manner and discovered by chance that if he used certain synonyms, the phrasing of the dialogue could, to the reader's imagination, seem more lewd than tender" (p. 9). Neither the editor nor readers notice these alterations. Consequently, "his initial abhorrence of the American's books turned into interest, and he looked forward to the new installments in the series, knowing that his translations would provide him with many delightful moments of authentic literary creation" (p. 10). Through these changes, Lugán expresses his desire to become a creator (author) rather than merely a re-creator (translator). Unfortunately, a professor at an American university discovers the changes made in the translation and writes to the translator, accusing him of being an "unfaithful and perverse translator" (p. 11)[9]. She adds that Lugán's objective was to ridicule Kate Courage, so that he "managed to undermine and malign her" (p. 11).

The translator tells his girlfriend Marta about the letter, but she disapproves of his unprofessional behavior. He defends himself, explaining that his textual manipulation turned his initial annoyance with Crossfield's detective "into a creative game" (p. 12). When Marta calls his conduct unprofessional, Lugán responds: "It's a sort of experimental translation. Why shouldn't we translators experiment, like authors do?" (p. 12). Again, Lugán seeks to equate his work with authorship, rejecting the translator's traditionally secondary role.

The translator writes an apologetic letter to both the professor and author. The author responds: "I don't even consider it essential to file a complaint against you. Furthermore, your pathetic actions as a resentful man and a true *traduttore traditore* have given me an idea for a new book" (p. 14). Her novel will feature a character "like you, an unfaithful translator whose death, because the role corresponding to such a character in my novel's plot will be that of the victim, will be meticulously and effectively investigated by Kate" (p. 14). As Marcos Eymar observes, Merino's narrative now shifts into the fantastical: real and fictional worlds dissolve, trapping the translator within the novelist's conceived adventures (2014: 117). After Crossfield's letter, Lugán notices he's being followed.

Lugán is assaulted and hospitalized. He later receives Crossfield's latest novel, *The Case of the Unfaithful Translator*, in which the detective Kate Courage visits a European city like the translator's own. Courage discovers a mistranslation in a friend's book and then decides to physically harm the translator of that book as she "manages to recruit a young psychopath who's an aspiring writer, to whom she feeds the idea as if it were the subject for a novel that she proposes that he write, assuring him that she'll help him get it published" (p. 21). An established author seeks vengeance against a translator who has been creating his own texts through deliberate mistranslations. The author's revenge involves targeting a translator (who aspires to become a writer himself) with the ironic punishment of being physically harmed by another aspiring author who is promised publication as an author when the deed is done. As he lies in the hospital recovering in the early hours of the morning, Lugán receives an unexpected visit from a mysterious woman who bears the same physical characteristics as the detective Kate Courage. This uncanny resemblance between the real visitor and the fictional detective he has been translating creates an unsettling blur between reality and fiction.

The aspiring author pays a hefty price when his attempt to become an author and assume an active authorial role ultimately fails. Instead of gaining the creative control he has sought desperately, he discovers that he has become merely a character trapped within a larger plot devised by Katherine Crossfield herself. This ironic reversal transforms him from someone who sought to manipulate fictional narratives into a powerless figure subject to another author's literary machinations. Ultimately, Lugán's fate serves as a cautionary tale, where his attempts to gain creative control ironically led to his entrapment within the very fictional world he sought to manipulate.

The analysis of Barbara Wilson's *Mi novelista* and José María Merino's *The Case of the Unfaithful Translator* reveals the complex and often contentious nature of authorship in translation studies. Both narratives critically examine the traditional subservient role of the translator, elevating their interpretive and creative contributions to a form of co-creation co-authorship. Wilson's use of pseudotranslation in *Mi novelista* directly challenges the notion of a sole author, positioning the translator, Cassandra Reilly, as the de facto author. Similarly, Merino's *The Case of the Unfaithful Translator* explores Antonio Lugán's desire to transcend his role as a mere re-creator and become a creator, blurring the lines between reproduction and original creation through deliberate textual manipulation.

The stories examined in this section collectively demonstrate how unfaithful fictional translators, in their pursuit of authorial recognition, subvert conventional understandings of originality and ownership in literary production.

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9 The English translation uses "unfair" for the Spanish *desleal*, but I have chosen "unfaithful" as it better aligns with the story's central theme.

6. Conclusions

This examination of unfaithful fictional translators and interpreters reveals the profound complexity underlying what might appear to be straightforward linguistic mediation. Through their various transgressions (Gallus's kleptomaniac interventions, Marana's systematic literary manipulations, the footnote-wielding narrators' spatial usurpations, Melas's ethically driven deviations, Aguilar and Malinche's politically motivated mistranslations, and the authorial aspirations of Cassandra and Lugán) these characters collectively challenge the traditional conception of translators and interpreters as invisible, neutral conduits.

Rather than merely serving as cautionary tales about professional misconduct, these fictional narratives illuminate fundamental tensions within translation studies: the impossibility of absolute neutrality, the creative agency inherent in all linguistic transfer, the complex power dynamics between authors and translators, and the ethical dilemmas that arise when professional codes conflict with moral imperatives or political resistance. The recurring theme of "infidelity" in these stories extends beyond simple textual deviation to encompass broader questions about loyalty, ownership, and the nature of meaning itself. These narratives suggest that infidelity in translation is a lens through which we can view the broader complexities of cultural negotiation, asserting that the act of translation is always an exercise of power, whether it seeks to uphold or disrupt the status quo.

Building upon the analysis of "unfaithful" practices in transfiction, future research could extend this ethical framework to a broader variety of genres and cultural contexts. While current scholarship often prioritizes a "strategically designed" corpus of European and Latin American authors, expanding into Asian or African transfiction may reveal distinct cultural norms regarding the interplay of fidelity and authorship. Scholars might further investigate the concept of "closelaborations," as described by Suzanne Jill Levine, to determine how creative boundaries are negotiated and blurred within shared intellectual spaces.

Furthermore, the evolution of modern "unfaithful" practices (such as the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the rise of collective translation platforms) presents a critical opportunity to re-evaluate traditional concepts of authorial ownership and the stability of the source text. Future research could also apply this ethical framework to other genres, such as cinema and audiovisual media, to examine translational infidelity in diverse formats. By examining these deviant practices, researchers can better understand the complex negotiations between accuracy and adaptation that characterize the translator's role as a cultural intermediary. Ultimately, the transfictional works included in this article, suggest that the perceived untrustworthiness of translators and interpreters may stem not from their inherent duplicity, but from society's discomfort with acknowledging the active, creative, and inevitably subjective nature of all translation/interpreting. By literalizing and exaggerating the translator's/interpreter's potential for intervention, these fictional narratives paradoxically reveal the truth that all translation/interpreting involves transformation. Recognizing this reality, rather than perpetuating myths of invisible fidelity, offers a more honest and productive foundation for understanding the translator's/interpreter's essential role in cross-cultural communication.

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