

MARKO MILETICH (ED.), *Transfiction. Characters in Search of Translation Studies* (Wilmington, Malaga: Vernon Press, 2024)

In straddling languages, cultures, and interpersonal interactions, it is perhaps unsurprising that characters based on translators and interpreters have proved a fertile source of literary creativity. Indeed, the liminality inherent in the profession has encouraged numerous responses from literature and culture, as expertly analysed by the six contributions in *Transfiction. Characters in Search of Translation Studies*.

A slim but concise volume at 114 pages, *Transfiction* is edited by Marko Miletich, assistant professor of Spanish, translation, and interpreting at SUNY Buffalo State University (United States). As detailed in the book's acknowledgements, the work has its origins in a panel at the 2022 Northeast Modern Language Association conference and is published by Vernon Press in its 'Series in Literary Studies' collection.

By way of introduction (xv-xxiii), Miletich briefly presents the scope and content of the volume, delineating the titular concept of 'transfiction' as referring to the "use of translation and translators/interpreters in fiction" (xv). In summarising prior scholarship on the topic, he notes the growing academic interest in the subject since the turn of the century (as evidenced by several conferences, edited volumes, and journal special issues), whilst also highlighting the long-standing interest on the part of authors (harking back to Cervantes) and readers in fictional depictions of translators and interpreters as well as of the activities of translation and interpreting themselves.

The first chapter (1-16), by Marella Feltrin-Morris, is concerned with three acclaimed novels authored by the Italian EU official Diego Marani, himself a translator and language expert. In her comparative study of *New Finnish Grammar*, *The Last of the Vostyachs*, and *The Interpreter*, Feltrin-Morris analyses how complex themes relating to language, identity, and the seemingly endless search for both are interwoven into the narratives, as exemplified in *The Interpreter* by the nameless protagonist's dogged quest for the 'Ur' (or 'original') language of humankind.

In Chapter 2 (17-34), Caragh Barry examines the depiction of the character of Makina in the 2009 novella *Signs Preceding The End of World*, by the Mexican author and academic Yuri Herrera. In outlining the similarities that Makina displays with accounts of La Malinche, the real-life 16th century Indigenous interpreter to Hernán Cortés and the conquistadores during the early Spanish colonisation of the Americas, Barry analyses the character through the prism of interpreter ethics, drawing attention to relevant and enduring questions of power, agency, and also of activism.

The contribution by Irem Ayan (35-50) grapples with the sacrosanct issue of interpreter neutrality as portrayed in the 2003 work *The Interpreter*, by Suki Kim. In this third chapter, the author places a sociological lens to determine how the novel's principal protagonist, a female Korean court interpreter in the United States, subverts the guiding professional principle of

neutrality for a variety of ends (including as an amateur detective), thus demonstrating the complex interplay between linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and gender factors.

Katie Kitamura's novel *Intimacies* is the focus of Yan Wu's study (51-68), which centres on the intimate nature of the interpreting process as portrayed in the novel. This means the female protagonist's work as an elite conference interpreter at the International Criminal Court as well as the liaisons in her personal life. Again, issues relating to power and visibility in both contexts come to the fore, thus underscoring the multifarious nature epitomised by the interpreter's role.

A translator's death is the catalyst for a detective novel (*La aventura de las pruebas de imprenta*) by the Argentinean writer Rodolfo Walsh, which is analysed here by volume editor Marko Miletich (69-86). Through sub-sections exploring the nature of visibility and invisibility, Miletich zones in on the seemingly frequent parallels between the different types of sleuthing performed by translators (in terms of searching for words) with that conducted by detectives, thereby highlighting the interesting and unexpected similarities between the two activities.

Sheela Mahadevan's chapter (87-104) examines the 2012 novella *Translator Translated* by the Indian author Anita Desai, which centres on the juncture between translation, transcreation, and the practice of creative writing. Taking selected scenes from the work, she illustrates how the specific trajectory of the main character, an English literature graduate and aspiring author, develops as the result of a series of circumstances, analysing how these different factors interact and providing useful insights into the multilingual Indian context.

Transfiction is concluded by a brief afterword (105-107) from Miletich, who highlights the common themes present in the six chapters, and a comprehensive index. As also detailed in this review, the analyses of transfictional portrayals present in the book include various relevant aspects relating to power, agency, and visibility, as well as issues of ethics, status, and role. Indeed, the volume's conciseness can be said to be an important strength given that, though the chapters differ considerably in their choice of literatures and genres, the presence of these linked threads can be said to give the volume coherence and unity from a thematic perspective. In short, through furnishing the reader with six insightful and detailed analyses of fictional depictions of translators and interpreters in contemporary literature, this succinct and accessible edited collection will certainly be of broad appeal to scholars with research interests in literary and translation studies.

ANTONY HOYTE-WEST

antony.hoyte.west@gmail.com

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