Ways to (Dis)Appear:
Dragomans[1] Committing Suicide in Stories by Julio Cortázar and Rodolfo Walsh

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Abstract

Recent depictions of translators in fiction illustrate individuals devoted to this task as flesh and blood humans that exhibit an array of emotions. Two Latin American short stories, *"Carta a una señorita en París"* (1951) by Julio Cortázar and *"Nota al pie"* (1967) by Rodolfo Walsh, introduce readers to translators who take their own lives. The characters' suicides remove them from the world of the living as they are erased from view and eventually become imperceptible and invisible. Their deaths also make them more visible as their suicides raise unanswered questions and provide written texts that explain their violent action.

Key Words

Cortázar, invisibility, Transfiction, visibility, Walsh.

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Translators should be thought of as busy matchmakers praising a half-veiled beauty as worthy of our love: they excite an irresistible yearning for the original.

'The translator as matchmaker' Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1826)

Introduction

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[1] Although the term *dragoman* (in Spanish *trujamán*) was used to describe an official interpreter in countries where Arabic, Turkish, and Persian were spoken during the Ottoman Empire during the 15th and 16th centuries, it is used here in a more general (and poetic) sense to mean translator.

Throughout literature, translators and interpreters have appeared as fictional representations of their real-life human counterparts. Fiction reinforces the socially dichotomous views of translators that exist in society; in fact, translators are often shown to be:

> Invisible and ubiquitous, subordinate and powerful, faithful and dubious, oppressed and incontrollable, and they can enable or prevent communication - in other words they are beings that are hard to grasp because they're constantly in motion and have so many layers to them. (Kaindl, 2014: 9).

The binary aspects of translation (source text/target text, original/translation, author/translator) permeates the traditional ideas that describe translation and translators. Even one of the patrons of translators, Hermes, functions between two realms; for he is the messenger of the gods, (the go-between mortals and the gods). Comparatively, the translator is the broker between two texts. Hermes is also the god of travelers and roads. Likewise, translators facilitate "travelling" from one text to another. In addition, Hermes is the "guide of souls (*psychopompos*) to the realm of Hades under the earth." (Morford and Lenardon, 1977: 182). A guide that facilitates the passage between the living (visible) and the dead (invisible).[2]

Dichotomies have been present in Translation Studies since the first writings on translation appeared in the western sphere.[3] An overview of a few examples follows. Dichotomizing views abound in many of the early works on translation. Cicero (55 B. C. E.) was one of the first to make a distinction between a literal versus a communicative approach in translation (a precursor to Vermeer (1989) who later coined the term "skopos," meaning purpose, to refer to this communicative approach). Another clear contrast is discussed by Jerome (395 C. E.) as he favors a sense-for sense approach instead of a word-for-word translatorial strategy. Leonardo Bruni (1424/26) also describes two opposites; translating literally or rendering meaning, as he opts for the latter. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1813) discussed two different poles regarding translation: bringing the reader to the foreign text versus bringing the foreign text to the reader. Like many of his contemporaries, he believes the ideal translation should

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[2] It is curious to note that the union of Hermes and Aphrodite produces Hermaphroditus who in turn unites with Salmacis to produce a hermaphrodite, a living binary. (Morford and Lenardon, 1977: 183-185).

[3] There also dichotomies shown in Asian perspectives on translation. Due to space limitations these will not be addressed here. For Asian perspectives, see Wakabayashi, 2011 and Hung and Wakabayashi, 2005.

bring the target language reader to the source language text. (These ideas will later be restated by Venuti (1995) as foreignizing versus domesticating.) One of the latest juxtapositions can be found in Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet (1995) who propose two methods of translation: direct (literal) and oblique (requiring syntactical and/or semantical adjustments in the target language).

Fictional translators often "represent a discursive vehicle for highlighting the presence rather than the absence of the translator; or, to put it another way, fictional translators can be seen as embodiments of the "visible translator" theorized by Venuti" (Wilson, 2007: 393).[4] Invisibility is often associated with the work of translators. They are traditionally considered secondary to authors and should interfere as little as possible with the almighty source text to leave few, if any, traces of themselves. Translation has often been associated to ideas regarding production and reproduction. In literature, the creative art of writing is considered a form of production and it is usually represented by one person (a text may have several authors, but it is not very common) who is always perceptible. Literary translation, however, is considered a reproductive art where often the translator becomes faded and therefore somewhat imperceptible.

The surge of translators and interpreters in fiction has created a subfield of Translation Studies, termed *Transfiction.* This subfield studies the use of translation, translators, and interpreters in fiction. It explores theoretical aspects of translation, the process of translation itself, preconceived notions of translators and interpreters, and translators and their translational choices.[5] In recent years, several scholars have investigated this use of translation, translators, and interpreters in fiction. Julio César Santoyo (1984) studies the way in which translation is used as a narrative technique; Jon Thiem (1995) analyzes how translators are often seen as heroic figures; Adriana Pagano (2002) looks into Julio Cortázar's use of translation and translators in his fiction; Beverly Curran (2005) examines fictional translators in Anglophone literature; Judy Wakabayashi (2005) explores the representations of translators and translation in Japanese fiction; Edwin Gentzler (2008) investigates the theme of translation in the formation of national identities in Latin America; Michael Cronin (2009) and Klaus Kaindl (2012) showcase the way in which translators are represented in literature and film; Ingrid Kurz (2014) describes the (in)fidelity of fictional

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[4] Lawrence Venuti believes translator invisibility is the product of a "domesticating" translation that promotes producing an idiomatic target text that erases foreignness. He also believes this lack of visibility is due to the subordination of the translator to the author (Venuti, 1995: 1-10 and sic passim).

[5] For an in-depth look at Transfiction, see Kaindl and Spitzl, 2014.

interpreters; and Rosemary Arrojo (2018), one of the most productive scholars in this field, examines the didactic ways in which Latin American fiction can be utilized to approach translation theory. All this scholarly research points to literature as an instrument to analyze past and existing notions regarding translation and translators, and how they function in society. Recent research has concentrated on the importance of representations of translators and interpreters as well. Dror Abend-David's *Representing Translation: The Representation of Translation and Translators in Contemporary Media* (2019) showcases the impact of film and media as it contributes to the visibility of translators and interpreters.

Two short stories that showcase a connection to translation theory regarding visibility are analyzed here: "Carta a una señorita en París" (1951) by Julio Cortázar and "Nota al pie" (1967) by Rodolfo Walsh. Both stories explore the topic of death as the main characters take their own lives. Death is a common trope in literature and stories that employ death in their narrations are "not merely preoccupied with the painful scene of dying or individual loss, but the concept of death can be understood more widely as a site of many projections and fantasies and as a metaphor of many social issues" (Hakola and Kivistö, 2014,: viii). In the case of our two stories, two translators reflect on their positions in society as they struggle to understand their visibility. Furthermore, death has been associated with authorship. Roland Barthes was the first intellectual to suggest that modern texts are read in such a way that they make the author absent (1977: 145). He goes on to propose: "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (1977: 148). It is the reader (interpreter [of a text]) who constructs the meaning of a text; thus (s)he is responsible for the productive reading act. Since translators are both readers (professional readers) and (co)authors, they are both alive (as readers), as well as dead (as authors), if we follow Barthes' premise to its logical end.[6] This article will argue that the actions of our translators in these stories make them both alive (visible) as readers of someone else's work and by being present, as well as dead (invisible), both as authors of translations and by taking their own lives and erasing themselves from society.

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[6] For an interesting look at the death of the author and the visibility of the translator see Arrojo, 1995.

1. Felo-de-se

Felo-de-se, from the Latin "felon of himself," is an archaic legal term meaning suicide. The word *suicide* was firstly introduced in the seventeenth century and is said to be derived from the Latin words *sui* (of oneself) and *caedere* (to cut down, strike, kill). It seems that the first to coin the term *suicide* was Sir Thomas Browne "—a physician and a philosopher— in his *Religio Medici* (1642). The new word reflected a desire to distinguish between the homicide of oneself and the killing of another" (Minois, qtd. in De Leo et al.: 7).

People consider suicide for many reasons.[7] Although suicide may seem at first like act of hostility, "there are more factors to the psychodynamics of suicide than hostility" (Shneidman, 2001: 8). A variety of factors are involved, including "rage, guilt, anxiety, dependency, and a great number of predisposing conditions. The feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and abandonment are very important." (Shneidman, 2001: 8). In Cortázar's and Walsh's stories, we encounter translators who have lost all hope and have decided to take their own lives. Their fatal act does not go unnoticed since suicide can be often seen as "'attention-seeking behaviour'," (Jaworski, 2016: 2). Suicides often attract a lot more attention than a natural death, since many questions arise regarding the reasons behind the act and the condition of the person who makes such an extreme decision. In addition, suicide "has been pictured as beautiful, heroic, bold, as well as ugly, criminal, cowardly" (Brown, 2001: 10).[8] Suicide, then, creates a juxtaposition of meanings that serve as an invitation for interpretation and reflection.

One recently developed theory of suicide (labeled Interpersonal Theory of Suicide) posits suicide as caused "by the simultaneous presence of two interpersonal constructs — thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness" (Van Orden, et al., 2010: 575). Thwarted belongingness refers to someone who is disconnected from the world and does not seem to belong anywhere, while perceived burdensomeness denotes a feeling of being a liability to others (Boccio and Macari, 2013: 255). As we shall see, our two fictional

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[7] There is a branch of psychology dedicated to the scientific study of suicide, which is known as Suicidology. For an in-depth look into Suicidology see Maris et al.'s *Comprehensive Textbook of Suicidology* (2000).

[8] Since the nineteenth century there has been abundant research on suicide. Émile Durkheim's seminal work *On Suicide* (1897) proposes a sociological classification of suicide and suggests that suicide is motivated by aspects of one's position in relationship to society at different levels (Durkheim, 1951, p: 146-276 and sic passim).

translators believe themselves to be a burden and feel they have failed to contribute to their respective social environments. In addition, they lead very solitary lives. They experience a great deal of social isolation, which "is arguably the strongest and most reliable predictor of suicidal ideation, attempts, and lethal suicide behavior" (Van Orden, et al., 2010: 579).

Voluntary death is also accompanied by a climate of discomfort. Suicide affects not only the self-killer and those left behind, but also society at large, as it tries to make sense of such a desperate act. People who commit suicide often leave suicide notes, which "are communications that also represent the proverbial *last word"* (Maris, et al., 2000: 266). This textual presence, therefore, is a way to create visibility; a way to be present. The reason to leave a suicide note is to explain the act and to somehow be remembered (to be visible) after the self-inflicted death (to become invisible).

Both our characters are unable to deal with their respective plights and decide to end their lives as they seem unable to cope with their circumstances. Their preoccupation with their own visibility and invisibility becomes so problematic, that their only solution is to erase themselves taking their own lives. Both, however, leave a visible text that functions as a suicide note.

1.1. Literary suicides

Literature is filled with characters who commit suicide. Authors have used the suicide of a character to portray despair, love, dishonor, defiance, or to escape someone's advances. A self-made ending provides an opportunity to communicate experiences in narrative form (which in fiction are already narrativized) to better understand those experiences. It provides a view into the life of a deceased character and the mark left by its act/absence.

Spanish and Latin American literature include many suicides. What follows are examples of these voluntary deaths in some well-known literary texts. One of the first suicides in Spanish literature is that of Melibea in *La Celestina: Comedia o Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* (1499), attributed to Fernando de Rojas. Calisto falls to his death after visiting Melibea who commits suicide unable to stand the pain caused by her lover's death. A manic-depressive character, Andrés, in Eugenio Cambacérès's *Sin rumbo* (1885), kills himself unable to withstand his senseless life. Federico García Lorca's *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (1945) showcases a memorable suicide as the main character, Adela, hangs herself after her lover, Pepe el Romano, is announced to have been killed by her mother. In Borges's

"Emma Zunz" (1948), Emma's father takes his own life after being falsely accused of theft by his boss. To avenge her father's death, Emma loses her virginity to a stranger so she could argue that her boss had raped her and that she killed him in self-defense. An unnamed doctor in Gabriel García Márquez's *La hojarasca* (1955) hangs himself as he becomes unable to bear the hostility of the townspeople in the town of Macondo. In Estela Canto's *El estanque* (1956), Jacinta Medinar ends her life as she feels unloved by her mother and experiences hallucinations. Enrique Ossorio's suicide in Ricardo Piglia's *Respiración artificial* (1980), leads to a closer look at the lives of several characters associated with Argentinean history.[9]

1.2. Suicidal translators

The self-inflicted death of our fictional translators can be used to explore issues regarding the visibility and invisibility of literary translators. As mentioned, Julio Cortázar's "Carta a una señorita en París" and Rodolfo Walsh's "Nota al pie" showcase translators who take their own lives.[10] These stories provide an interesting look into the psyche of a translator, the translation industry, the relationship between translator and text, and translational choices. This analysis will concentrate mostly on visibility/invisibility issues. There are many other issues related to Translation Studies that can be explored through these two stories. Those will be mentioned in the conclusion.

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[9] For a comprehensive look at suicide in early Latin American novels see Schwartz, 1975.

[10] Argentinean writer Julio Cortázar was actually born in Brussels. He authored many exemplary novels, among them *Rayuela* (1963) which is an open-ended novel where the reader is encouraged to rearrange the different parts of the novel according to a plan suggested by the author. He published collections of short stories among which stand out *Bestiario* (1951), from which our story is taken. He was also an accomplished literary translator and translated works by Daniel Dafoe and Edgar Allan Poe among others. In several of his stories, translation is mentioned often. Several characters in his short stories are translators. Cortázar died in Paris on February 12, 1984.

Rodolfo Jorge Walsh was born in Río Negro, Argentina in 1927. In 1953, he published a volume of short stories, *Variaciones en rojo*. He is best known for a work of investigative journalism *Operación masacre,* first published in 1957. He is one of the "desaparecidos" who disappeared during Argentine military dictatorship: It is believed that he died in 1977 although his body was never found. He worked as a translator and editor for the publishing house Hachette where he translated thrillers, mystery, and detective fiction by writers Ellery Queen, Victor Canning, and William Irish. In 1967 he published the collection of short stories *Un kilo de oro* which includes "Nota al pie".

Cortázar's "Carta a una señorita en París" was published in 1951 as part of the collection of short stories entitled *Bestiario* The story is written in the form of a letter that the protagonist-narrator, a translator, leaves for Andrea, the owner of the apartment he has moved into while she is in Paris. In his letter, the protagonist explains what has happened from the moment he moved into the apartment until he jumps from the balcony to put an end to his life. The cause of this drastic decision comes after the main character begins to vomit bunnies from the first moment he arrives at Andrea's apartment.

Walsh's "Footnote" was published in 1967 as part of the collection of short stories entitled *Un kilo de oro*. León de Sanctis, a translator of detective novels and later science-fiction novels, has committed suicide. Otero, a senior editor of a publishing house, is summoned to the boarding house of his subordinate. The text is divided two narratives. One that describes what Otero thinks of his subordinate as it describes the events leading to the main character's death. The second narrative is a progressively increasing footnote written by the protagonist as he discusses his life choices.

2. Ars moriendi Cortázar

The nameless protagonist and narrator in *"Carta a una señorita en París"* jumps to his death from a balcony after house sitting for a friend. María Constanza Guzmán convincingly proposes that in Cortázar's story "an analogy can be drawn between translation and the experience of the protagonist-narrator, in relation to the translator's experience of 'inhabiting' a text that is somebody else's property, an original order to which the translator owes fidelity" (2006: 78). The whole story can be read as a commentary on translation and the unavoidable presence of the translator when transforming a text from one language to another. The translator character starts vomiting bunnies, which disturbs the space this translator inhabits. His inability to stay invisible is punctuated by the appearance of these rabbits which in turn make him more visible and unable to control his, not so-subtle, presence. The bunnies represent a "perceived burdensomeness" through an ungovernable alterity, as the translator's desire to be invisible is thwarted.

From the very beginning of the story the main character states "me duele ingresar en un orden cerrado" (9)[11] The protagonist is temporarily inhabiting a space (read foreign text) to later move on to "a alguna otra casa…" (10). This can be interpreted as going from one text to another, as translators do as they move from assignment to assignment. He tries to go unnoticed without disturbing the "original" space, which again, can be interpreted as a source text. A source text that the translator does not want to disturb as he attempts to maintain a certain fidelity towards that space/text that he briefly will inhabit.

The constant fear of disturbing the harmony of his environment, is described by the protagonist as he deals with uncontrollably vomiting rabbits. To no avail, he tries to be inconspicuous (invisible), but the rabbits make him detectible (visible). The vomiting of the bunnies is associated to "the creative act and to creation as living experience" (Guzmán, 2006: 79), which in turn reveals an unwanted visible presence. Tension grows as the protagonist tries unsuccessfully to conceal his presence. The number of bunnies is manageable if they reach ten, a symbol of perfection since it represents a round even number that is manageable.[12] Once this limit has been surpassed by vomiting an eleventh bunny, the protagonist decides to kill the rabbits by throwing them and himself off the apartment balcony. The small rabbits, which can be said to symbolize fertility, and therefore creativity, add to the burden of an unwanted visibility. These bunnies, however, are not the cute and adorable animals most of us have in mind:

> Pero estos conejos transgreden y traicionan…. … los conejos representan el impulso creador del traductor, quien se encuentra sometido a la tensión entre el deber de fidelidad al texto original/al orden del departamento y a su autora/la dueña y el impulso a dar rienda suelta a su creatividad, entre la falta de libertad y la necesidad de expresarse (Cibil, 1999: 68).

In fact, traditionally, translators are supposed to go unnoticed: "Today the translator remains subordinate to the author of the original work. The originality of translation rather lies in self-effacement, a vanishing act, and it is on that basis that translators prefer to be praised" (Venuti, 1992: 4). The protagonist is aware of this subordination and unable to maintain this secondary (less visible) position, decides to disappear altogether. The chosen act through which the translator attempts to disappear, however, ironically makes him more visible as

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[11] All textual quotes are taken from Cortázar in References. The numbers in parenthesis refer to page numbers in the story.

[12] The number 10 also represents a round even number also associated with humanity, as the number is present in our 10 fingers and 10 toes.

his suicide will produce (if only temporarily in this story) a dead body (more visible) which eventually leads to many inquiries and curiosities. In fact, the story is in the form of a letter, which, in this case, could be considered a suicide note. It is a way to narrativize the character's actions and therefore make him more visible.

In a passage reminiscent of Walter Benjamin, the character repairs a lamp that has been broken by one of the bunnies *"El trizado apenas se advierte, toda la noche trabajé con un cemento especial que me vendieron en una casa inglesa"* (16). Walter Benjamin states:

> Fragments of a vessel, which are to be glued together must much one another in the smallest detail, although they do not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel (2002: 82-81).

The translator recreates a broken lamp, which barely shows just like the "fragments of a greater language" (161) proposed by Benjamin. The barely noticeable repair/translation is visible, nevertheless. The hand of the translator attempts to make the visible invisible, unsuccessfully leaving his mark/presence.

Cortázar's story ends with: "No creo que les sea difícil juntar once conejitos salpicados sobre los adoquines, tal vez ni se fijen en ellos, atareados con el otro cuerpo que conviene llevarse pronto, antes de que pasen los primeros colegiales". (19) The translator jumps to his death with eleven rabbits that he hopes will not be noticed in the early morning suicide. Death is "a veritable change in state, a transformation from one kind of being to another kind of (non)being…" (Hakola and Kivistö, 2014: x). This translator's own body will become briefly visible before it is removed (he will *be* and *not be*). The story illustrates an evident interplay between visibility and invisibility.

3. Ars moriendi Walsh

The translator in "Nota al pie" commits suicide by poison. The very beginning of the story presents the main character, León de Sanctis, "desnudo y muerto

bajo esa sábana…" (419).[13] Right away we can both see the translator (as a covered corpse) and not see the translator (as he is covered by that same sheet). This image can symbolize the contradiction present in translations, as translators are expected to be imperceptible but inevitably become perceptible. The covering of the translator by a sheet can also lead to an analogy. The way translators are "covered" by a foreign text, suggests a presence not seen but nevertheless perceived/discerned/felt/signaled as they rewrite a text from one language to another.[14] The deceased translator is also naked which implies vulnerability. Unclothed bodies are completely exposed since our clothing largely represents who we are and how we are seen by others. Having clothes is also a way to conform to norms dictated by society. It is León's last action to rebel against society.

The short story utilizes two narratives. One relates the circumstances surrounding the suicide in addition to what Otero (his immediate supervisor)[15] thinks of his translator, as told by an omniscient third person narrator. The other narrative is a letter left by León for Otero that reveals Leon's life choices and experiences; a letter which Otero never reads. Leon's voice is narrated in the first person through a progressively increasing footnote that eventually occupies the whole page and displaces the other narrative. The first page of the story includes a one-line footnote. The narratives compete for space throughout the story until the footnote displaces the other narrative all together. The last page of the story is just a thirty-line footnote. Footnotes are a way in which translators make themselves visible through a translation. As Jacques Derrida informs us, a footnote "is also a text unto itself, rather detached, relatively decontextualized, or capable of creating its own context..." (Derrida, 1991: 194); thus, the footnote makes the reader aware of the presence of the translator and the contributions to the text. Furthermore, Derrida also maintains:

> the status of a footnote implies a normalized, legalized, legitimized distribution of space, a spacing that assigns hierarchical relationships: relationships of authority between the so-called principal text, the footnoted text, which happens to be higher (spatially and symbolically), and the footnoting text, which happens to be lower, situated in what could be called an inferior margin (1991: 193).

The footnote then marks both the intervention by a translator as well as the translator's position on the page (at the bottom with smaller font). The

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[13] All textual quotes are taken from Walsh in References. The numbers in parenthesis refer to page numbers in the story.

[14] For other translatorial issues related to this short story, see Miletich (2018).

[15] The significance of the names of the characters has also been analyzed in Miletich (2018).

translator's visibility is therefore minimized by his position and physical size of his intervention. The first footnote makes evident, the visibility of the deceased translator: "Lamento dejar interrumpida la traducción que la Casa me encargó" (419). The translator is present (through the footnote), but also not present as his death interrupts not only the assignment at hand but his very presence.

León's footnote functions as a kind of suicide note although it does not fully explain the reasons for the suicide. The note hints as his dissatisfaction with the publishing industry and his inability to be allowed to choose his assignments as the reasons for his fatal decision. In this story, the translator's plea for a more visible function becomes obscured by the character's decision to end his life and, therefore, disappear. Leon's job and his desire to be accepted start to transform him as he sinks into a profound depression; "un desgano, una dejadez me invadían insidiosamente" (444). He adds: "¿No es uno un pavoroso reloj que sufre con el tiempo?" (444). As he manages to translate at a faster rate, he is burdened by the requirements of his job. He feels others cannot understand his plight, particularly those with jobs that require manual labor "ignoraban lo que es sentirse habitado por otro, que es a menudo un imbécil: recién ahora me atrevo a pensar esa palabra; prestar la cabeza a un extraño, y recuperarla cuando está gastada, vacía, sin una idea, inútil para el resto del día" (444). The task of the translator seems to weigh down on Walsh's protagonist.

León has even managed to distance himself from his superior. Otero (León's immediate supervisor) has a distant relationship with the translator. As he sits in León's quarters, he muses "esta pieza que no conocía" (420). The omniscient narrator explains what Otero thinks about his subordinate as he arrives to Leon's apartment: "De golpe el otro se ha vuelto misterioso para él, como él se ha vuelto misterioso para el otro, y tiene su punta de ironía que ignore hasta la forma que eligió para matarse" (420). It appears the relationship between the two characters is far more distant than expected as the translator is somewhat less visible. Even the suicide method of his subordinate is unknown by Otero. The narrator describes Otero's feelings for his subordinate "de golpe le parece que no se hubieran conocido" (419). The translator seems to have gone unnoticed by his superior despite the many years working together. His subordinate has become becoming much less visible.

At a certain point, León realizes what the goal of all translation should be: "la verdadera cifra del arte: borrar su personalidad, pasar inadvertido, escribir como otro y que nadie lo note" (425). This desire not to be seen has León reminiscing about one of his major translations and the corrections it endured: "Pero lo que

me llenó de bochorno fue la implacable tachadura del medio centenar de notas al pie con que mi ansiedad había acribillado el texto. Ahí renuncié para siempre a ese recurso abominable" (438). No longer wishing to intervene in the text making himself present, he rejects that footnote strategy all together, which makes him less visible.

Paradoxically, as the story advances, this translator becomes more visible as his translations start bearing his initials "versión castellana de L. D. S. [León de Sanctis]". (441) Later, his full name appears: "Todos los meses aparecía uno de mis libros y mi nombre de traductor figuraba ahora completo" (442). The translator starts to appreciate his visibility to the point where actually supplants the author: "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" (446). The translator has not only made himself visible but has supplanted the author. León begins to gain status as a translator and begins making recommendations with "inclusive (y risible) deseo de influir en la política editorial de la Casa" (432). The character wants to come out of the shadows and have his voiced heard, something that will not happen. As Rosemary Arrojo points out, Walsh's story "constitutes a space for reflection on the practice of translation and on the translator's (in)visibility" (2018: 44).

4. Two voluntary deaths

In our stories both translators take their own lives as they erase themselves from the world of the (fictional) living. Both main characters struggle to keep themselves out of sight as much as possible. Cortázar's translator explains "Me es amargo entrar en un ámbito donde alguien que vive bellamente lo ha dispuesto todo como una reiteración visible de su alma" (9). His presence is an intrusion in an established order. León de Sanctis, Walsh's translator, has made himself invisible as he lays dead and covered by a sheet "desnudo y muerto bajo esa sábana" (419). These two stories share several similarities.

The desire to be invisible is plainly seen in both stories. In Cortázar's story (as already mentioned), the protagonist repairs a broken lamp, although the crack "apenas se advierte" (17). Cortázar's translator tries to be completely unnoticed and maintain the space in order. At times his presence cannot be avoided as the space shows "una leve decoloración de la alfombra" (17). He inevitably becomes more visible. When Cortázar's translator can no longer hide the destruction that

the bunnies have created (and therefore reveal his presence), he makes himself visible through a written text/suicide note "Dejaré esta carta esperándola" (18). When the bunnies add up to eleven in Cortázar's story, the protagonist decides to kill himself. The eleven bunnies disrupt the perfect order and make him ever more burdensome and visible. As eleven bunnies are splattered on the pavement below passers-by would be "atareados con el otro cuerpo" (19). The other body, that of the translator, has become visible and should be removed, "conviene llevarse pronto, antes de que pasen los primeros colegiales" (19); a strong desire to be swept away and become invisible, in this case removing the dead bunnies and his dead body. Our other translator, León believes that the key to the art of translation is "pasar inadvertido, escribir como otro y que nadie lo note" (425). He even rejects the textual strategy that can make him more visible: footnotes. As Cecilia Chabod maintains, the presence of the translators is unavoidable "la invisibilidad y la transparencia del traductor son imposibles. Siempre hay un cuerpo, un texto, una escritura, un manchón: signos tangibles de una presencia que no puede silenciarse" (109).

The two protagonists lead isolated social lives and experience the "thwarted belonginess" discussed previously. León lives alone, has few friends as he is estranged from his former colleagues at the garage where he used to work. He often avoids them "doy un rodeo para no encontrarlos". (434). León's only attempt at a relationship with women backfires when she cheats on him, and León writes: "Es lo más parecido al amor que puedo recordar". (445). Cortázar's protagonist seems to have a nomadic life, as noted by the statement, "me lance a alguna otra casa" (10), and does not discuss any personal relationships. Cortázar's translator seems to have no permanent address moving from one place to another, inhabiting a space that does not belong to him and few chances of developing relationships. It is the quintessential image of the translator as a lone being surrounded by books (León has long conversations with his dictionary, Mr. Appleton, and Cortázar's translator admires the books in his friend's apartment and carefully fixes the books damaged by the bunnies) and preoccupied with issues related to language. Both translators disregard human contact, which creates a kind of societal invisibility, and experience a feeling of estrangement. Both translators are solitary characters with few acquaintances (therefore less visible).

Both fictional translators become visible in different ways. Cortázar's protagonist starts to vomit rabbits into the borrowed space which, again, can be interpreted as a source text a translator "inhabits." His presence becomes burdensome and evident as he is responsible for a space that has unavoidably

changed, since the bunnies "han roído un poco los libros del anaquel más bajo" (16), which in turn forces the protagonist to hide this fact "los encontrará disimulados para que Sara no se dé cuenta" (612). Maintaining things as they were is a way to become invisible and go unnoticed as translators are traditionally expected to be. Walsh's translator, León de Sanctis, is visible from the beginning of the story (albeit as a corpse) although the reader is told that the protagonist's supervisor, Otero, has a hard time even visualizing the translator as he attempts to remember "la imagen perdida de León" (425). León becomes visible when his translations appear displaying his initials as the translator (441) and then later with his full name (442). León is proud of this fact, and he goes on to make himself more visible as he even supplants an author.

There are several differences between our two stories. The most obvious one in is the way both characters commit suicide. Cortázar's translator jumps from a balcony. Walsh's translator uses poison to kill himself; a suicide method more frequently used by women "men jump and shoot themselves. Today, women more often take sleeping pills, drink household potions, or turn on the kitchen stove, although guns are gaining" (Higonnet, 1985: 104).[16] One method of suicide seem to gather more attention (Walsh's) as the translator is present as a corpse in the story, while the other corpse (Cortázar's) is not expressively seen in the story. Cortázar's translator wishes to be taken away soon as his body could be removed from the street "pronto, antes de que pasen los primeros colegiales" (19). Both translators, however, eliminate themselves from the world of the (fictional) living as they make their bodies invisible; one by being covered by a sheet and the other by being quickly removed out of sight.

Another discernible difference between the two stories is the name of the translators. One is nameless and the other one has a name; León de Sanctis. The unnamed translator is a classic trope used in literature (the unnamed translator in Cortázar's 1983 "Diario para un cuento" comes to mind), an anonymity that can be said to further mask his visibility as he remains nameless.

Although both translators refer to translation, León discusses at length his translations an even his translational decision as he often has extended conversation with his dictionary regarding cognates and expressions (429, 435). Cortázar's translator, however, uses translation as an excuse to avoid social

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[16] For current discussions regarding the gendering of suicide, see Katrina Jaworski (2010) and (2016).

contact; when invited to social gatherings, he expresses "invento prolongadas e ineficaces historias de mala salud, de traducciones atrasadas, de evasión" (16).

Conclusions

Suicide is a deliberate act that forces others to take notice. As Margaret Higonnet asserts: "To take one's life is to force others to read one's death" (1985: 103). Our two stories force us to read these two suicides as textual testimonies of a struggle with visibility and invisibility. As noted above, suicide calls attention to oneself due to the unusual method of dying while also eliminating one's existence. The stories discussed here serve to analogize the way in which translators walk a fine line between both being visible and invisible.

The plight of the translators in our two stories echo recent ideas in Translation Studies that believe "texts and translators are frequently said to be operating in the *in-between*, a *space between*, or even a *third space*" (Batchelor, 2008). In fact, translators live a liminal existence. The word liminal comes from the Latin root, *limen,* which means "threshold" and "it meant the gate or barrier between two separate fields or spheres. From these origins, however, modern language has retained the sense of indeterminacy and in-betweenness rather than the clear-cut notion of separation or demarcation." (Gadoin and Rammel, 2013: 5). It is in this limbo that translators often live and are kept by traditional views on the role of translators where their presence "is basically unascribable, undescribable, neither here nor there" (Gadoin and Rammel, 2013: 5).

Historically, translators have been expected to inhabit a source text and hide within it. The inevitable trace left by translators (be it a broken lamp or a covered corpse) is inescapably perceptible. If the Author is dead, as Barthes will have us believe, so are translators as authors of a version of a foreign text. At the same time, if the Reader is alive, so are our translators since they must read to perform their duties. The way our fictional translators take their own lives makes them stand out; they are noticed and a become topic of discussion. On the other hand, their self-deaths results in them becoming unseeable (either as a corpse covered by a sheet or being quickly swept away); both actions reflect an effort to prevent others from seeing the translator's body/presence.

All stories that feature translators as main characters have many didactic purposes. In the case of these two stories, the notions of the translator's visibility and invisibility have been analyzed. There are many other aspects that could be

discussed in these two stories, such as the perception of translators by society, fidelity/infidelity, the editorial/translation industry, and translatorial decisions/choices among others.

As Hans Christian Hagedorn maintains, the fictional translator is characterized by his/her condition of intermediary who increasingly frees himself/herself from his limitations and gains more and more protagonism and identity (2006: 214). Our two translators have, consciously and/or inadvertently, created ways to make themselves visible despite societal restrictions. As the epigraph revealed, a translation is both obscured and partly revealed through a half-veil. We can extend the half-veil metaphor to represent translators. The veil symbolizes modesty and obedience (translators are told not to stand out [not to be visible] and be loyal/obedient to the author/source text) while the uncovered half of the veil inevitably reveals a presence, the inevitable trace of the translator. These Cortázar and Walsh stories have provided two fascinating tales that makes us aware of the way in which dragomans (dis)appear.

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