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Stranger than Fiction: The Biographies of Shiki Nagaoka and José Salas Subirat

Following the “cultural turn” of translation studies, recent works centered around translators have highlighted their longstanding invisibility while bringing to the fore the importance of their figure. The portrayal of translators in academic research, memoirs and biographies, and literary fiction can challenge commonplace assumptions about their task. In this article, I address the tension between the real practice of translation and its literary rendering by focusing on two biographies: a fictional one and a real one. The novel *Shiki Nagaoka: Una nariz de ficción*, by Mexican writer Mario Bellatin (translated into English by David Shook as *Shiki Nagaoka: A Nose for Fiction*), recounts the life of a Japanese writer and translator, and *El traductor del Ulises*, by Argentine scholar Lucas Petersen, researches the life of the first translator into Spanish of James Joyce’s masterpiece. Comparing and contrasting the fake biography of a fictional translator and the real biography of an actual translator, I draw especially from their paratexts: prologues, translation commentaries, archival research, and photographs that introduce the text, frame the narrative, and can corroborate or falsify its authenticity. The aim of this article is to foreground how representations of translators, whether historiographical or fictional, can assist in visibilizing the role of translators and, in turn, rethinking their task.

Keywords: fictional turn; translator; biography; paratexts

*Que la historia hubiera copiado a la historia
ya era suficientemente pasmoso;
que la historia copie a la literatura es inconcebible...*

Jorge Luis Borges

The “cultural turn” of translation studies, spearheaded by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere in the early 1990s, has brought about a shift in focus from translation to the translator. This visibilization of their role has affirmed translation as a decision-making process tied to translators’ subjectivity. Recent publications by translators respond to an interest in learning more about how they approach their task. These books offer meta-reflections and introspective insights. For example, Kate Briggs’s translational experience in *This Little Art*, Jennifer Croft’s fictionalized memoir *Homesick*, or the autobiographical chronicle of self-translation *In Other Words*, by Jhumpa Lahiri and translated by Ann Goldstein. In addition, other books by translators and translation scholars such as the volume *The Man Between: Michael Henry Heim & a Life in Translation*, edited by Esther Allen, Sean Cotter, and Russell Scott Valentino, or the monograph by María Constanza Guzmán *Gregory Rabassa’s Latin American Literature: A Translator’s Visible Legacy* pay tribute to the work of specific literary translators. As the scope of translation studies as a discipline continues to broaden, novels and short stories have also become a productive source for critical inquiry. This “fictional turn,” proposed first by Else Ribeiro Pires Vieira,¹ considers the recent upsurge of “transfiction”, i.e., literary works that include discussions on translation and feature translators as characters.² The recent books *Fictional Translators* by Rosemary Arrojo and *The Translator’s Visibility: Scenes from Contemporary Latin American Fiction* by Heather Cleary, to name but a couple of a growing corpus, illustrate how, in addition to biographical accounts, literature can act as a rich reference for translation studies and be a prime locus for the continued visibilization of the translator’s task.

By conceptualizing translation through models of representation, literary works subsequently have the potential for bridging the gap that often exists between the theorization and the practice of translation. But because readers would usually come to these texts with their own expectations and perceptions around translation and about translators, transfiction can often be met with resistance. For example, the volume

¹ Vieira, “(In)visibilidades na tradução: troca de olhares teóricos e ficcionais”, 50-68.

² Kaindl and Spitzl, *Transfiction*.

Crossing Borders, edited by Lynne Sharon Schwartz, includes both short stories and essays about translation (and some in translation) by a wide array of authors with varying degrees of experience with translation, including acclaimed writers Lydia Davis and Primo Levi. Notably, only an asterisk distinguishes the essays in an index that otherwise does not differentiate between fiction and non-fiction. In her review, however, Veronica Esposito praises the essays but objects to the short stories because of their “somewhat inaccurate representation of the discipline.”³ The reviewer is not alone in her annoyance at the often mismatch between her personal experience with translators and their fictional portrayal. In the context of translation, this is particularly relevant because it brings up issues of faithfulness of representation that permeate more traditional theoretical discourses and misconceptions around its practice. The tension between an original and its “copy,” the pervasive notion of translation’s impossibility to fully recreate an original, extends to transfiction and the tension between fact and fiction, reality and its literary rendering. The veracity of, and fidelity to, real events are central issues in biographical works; likewise it is worth expanding the analysis to include the representation of the translator’s profession in this literary genre.

In this article, I will focus on two biographies, a fake one and a real one. *Shiki Nagaoka: Una nariz de ficción* (2001), by Mexican writer Mario Bellatin (and translated into English as *Shiki Nagaoka: A Nose for Fiction* by David Shook in 2012), is a novel that recounts the life of a Japanese writer and translator named Shiki Nagaoka, and *El traductor del Ulises* [The Translator of *Ulysses*] (2016), by Argentine scholar Lucas Petersen, researches the life of José Salas Subirat, the first translator into Spanish of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. These two biographies can be mutually illuminating in that they make use of similar paratextual strategies that can both corroborate and falsify the authenticity of their claims. In order to examine the blurring of discursive authority proposed by these texts, I draw especially from their titles, cover images, and prologues that introduce the text, and the archival research and photographs that frame the narrative. Comparing

³ Esposito, “All the Thrills Without the Terror”.

and contrasting the fake biography of a fictional translator and the real biography of an actual translator, the aim of this article is to foreground how representations of translators, whether historiographical or fictional, can assist in visibilizing the role of translators and, in turn, rethinking their task.

Jorge Luis Borges has actually been attributed with being the first one to attempt a translation of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In 1925, just three years after it first appeared in English, he published his translation of only the last page of the modernist masterpiece in the magazine *Proa*. It was prefaced by an essay titled "El Ulises de Joyce" [Joyce's *Ulysses*], which was twice the length of the translation, and which would become seminal for his reflection on the work and notorious for confessing to not having fully comprehended it nor read it in its entirety. Borges's fragmented translation, along with his commentary on some of the linguistic and cultural challenges of the novel, helped create an aura of mystery around this obscure book, which would remain inaccessible to Spanish-speaking readers for a couple more decades still. During that time, several writers in Latin America and intellectuals of the Argentine literary sphere, Borges included, would entertain efforts to translate the work collaboratively. It would ultimately take an outsider, an insurance salesman with basic command of the English language, to accomplish the feat of the full-length translation of *Ulysses*, published by Editorial Rueda in 1945. In his biography, author Lucas Petersen unveils the story of José Salas Subirat, the man who managed to translate the quintessential untranslatable book in his free time. His life story is at times so unbelievably farfetched and utterly incredible that could pass for a work of fiction. It even includes a plane crash he miraculously survived but that destroyed the manuscript of the third and final revised version of his translation, and which would remain a lost enigma. Petersen's book is however impressively well documented. His research constructs Salas Subirat's life from his early childhood as the son of immigrants through his social ascent to a salesman of economic means, with records of all of his different addresses, his marriage and family life, his travels, hobbies, his incursions in literature, journalism and the arts, and his autodidactic language learning. Petersen also describes in detail Salas Subirat's odd jobs and other professional

endeavors, including working as a stenographer, agent, customs officer, toy manufacturer, and being the author of bestselling self-help and personal development books. He did not belong to the times' cultural elite nor was he part of a group of authors who also translated. José Salas Subirat was by all accounts a rather unexpected translator for the task at hand. Petersen's book tells the spectacular story of someone spectacularly minor, much in the same way *Ulysses* explores the life of the common man, and indeed there are parallels between Joyce's translator and Leopold Bloom, the fictional protagonist of Joyce's novel. Grounded on veritable facts and archival research, Petersen claims to have written the book against the temptation to exploit those, yet acknowledges that many times his "investigación parecía ir tras la vida y la trayectoria no de un ser humano sino del último, *el más real* de los personajes de Joyce" [investigation seemed to be going after the life and career not of a human being but of the last, *the most real* of Joyce's characters].⁴ The first biography of an Argentine translator, *El traductor del Ulises* is an invaluable resource for the construction of an archive that historicizes translators in the Latin American literary tradition and contributes to a wealth of representations of translators that challenge traditional expectations of the translator's task.

Mario Bellatin is an author known for his literary acrobatics that defy authorial privilege and destabilize authenticity, challenging readers to push the boundaries of literature. The mystifying extraliterary events that surround and make up an integral part of his work have made of Bellatin a cult writer and a nonconformist artist whose oeuvre is never fully contained by the written text.⁵ Staging the scene for the literary forgery to come, Shiki Nagaoka manifested in an interview, when Bellatin was asked about his favorite writer. The supposed interest raised by this author who was virtually unknown in the Western world led Bellatin to write his biography. As its subtitle indicates, Nagaoka's work could not be fully understood without acknowledgment of, and attention to, his physical deformity. He was the bearer of a notoriously

⁴ Petersen, *El traductor*, 11 (emphasis added). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

⁵ Logie, "¿Escritos en la traducción y para la traducción?", 205.

large nose, which made him resemble closely the character of a 1916 short story by Japanese writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke; a likeness ultimately heightened by Bellatin's claim that Nagaoka's nose was so extraordinarily big "he was considered by many to be a fictional character."⁶ Playfully confounding fact and fiction, a recurrent trope in Bellatin's literature, the book is "a biography of a fictional Japanese writer based on the fiction of a real one."⁷ Yet when *Shiki Nagaoka: Una nariz de ficción* first came out in 2001, it was received by the press as a work of nonfiction, followed by a series of lecture-performances by Bellatin dedicated to the Japanese writer. It was the seriousness of Bellatin's dedication to his ploy which seemed to be the only evidence of Nagaoka's existence.⁸ A little bit over a decade later, however, a new chapter in the fabrication of this character ensued, when Phoneme Media published the novel in David Shook's English translation, which included a preface that confirmed Nagaoka as a real writer. The translation, a literary work in its own right, sustains and expands Bellatin's literary happening, adding a new text that is subordinated to the original yet subverts its authorial hierarchies. In the novel, the same resource characterizes the work of Shiki Nagaoka, who uses a translational approach in his creative writing: "[He] began to write his literary texts in English or French, to later convert them into his mother tongue, thereby achieving the effect that everything from his pen resembled a translation."⁹ The blurring of the lines between writing and translating responds to Bellatin's characteristic intermingling of artistic disciplines. In *Shiki Nagaoka*, for example, he introduces photography into the narrative which, as we shall see, is a key component in the dismantling of authorial discourse at play in the book. Lastly, another way in which Bellatin carries out his narrative experimentation with authenticity is by presenting the novel as a pseudotranslation. Praises for, and back covers of, Mario Bellatin's novels boast about having been translated into over two

⁶ Bellatin, *Shiki Nagaoka*, 11.

⁷ Cleary, *The Translator's Visibility*, 90.

⁸ Cuenca, "The Seed of Uncertainty".

⁹ Bellatin, *Shiki Nagaoka*, 13.

dozen languages, but he has also made “translations without novels.”¹⁰ Such is the case of *Shiki Nagaoka*, inviting a reconsideration of literary categories and genres, such as novel and biography, and also of narrative subjects, such as author and translator. In this context, it is not superfluous to wonder how translation imbues his literary production and, in turn, how his experience may color the literary representation of his translator: “Most authors construct a *mise en abyme* which makes their translator figures function as images of themselves. This strategy suggests that translation and writing are allied phenomena of re-inscription of the self.”¹¹

With a translator protagonist, whether real or fictional, Lucas Petersen’s biography and Mario Bellatin’s novel are bringing to the foreground a figure that has traditionally remained marginal or hidden. Furthering this thematic transgression are the elements that surround their narratives, i.e., the paratext, which influences the reading experience and shapes the reception of the work through commentary that is legitimated by authorial intentions.¹² For the translator, the paratext has largely been a place of (in)visibility. While forewords and translator notes have served as the privileged space where translations are revealed as such, footnotes have often been taken as an admittance of the translator’s failures, and it is still not uncommon for book covers to omit the translator’s name, contributing to the erasure of the mediation process in favor of a fiction of originality. Making use of the elastic boundaries between reality and its literary representation that the books by Bellatin and Petersen explore, their paratexts fittingly employ strategies that simultaneously comply and destabilize authorial and translatorial conventions.

The titles themselves, and their respective display on the covers, already suggest interesting dynamics in place. Both are divided in a title and a subtitle. In the case of Bellatin’s novel in English translation (see Figure 1), the full title appears at the bottom of the cover, divided in two. First appears the main title – *Shiki Nagaoka*

¹⁰ Cabrera, “Mario Bellatin”.

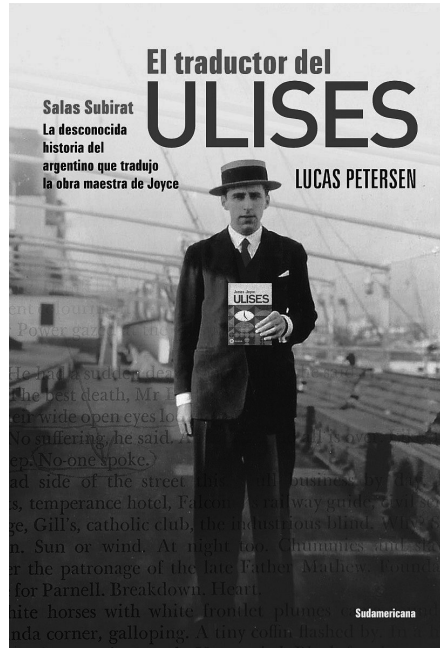
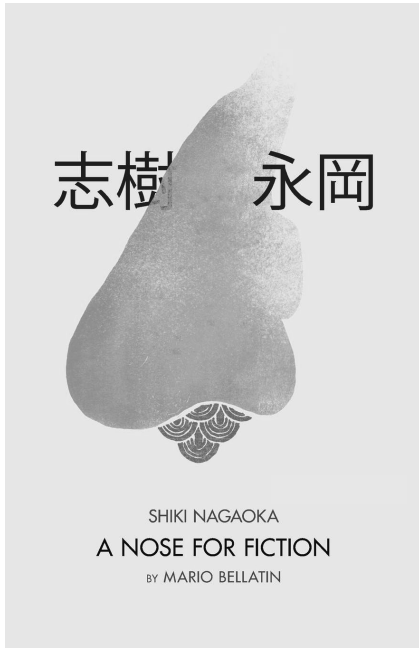
¹¹ Wilson, “The Fiction of the Translator”, 393.

¹² Batchelor, *Translation and Paratexts*, 12-13.

– in an olive-green color and a medium size, followed below by the subtitle – *A Nose for Fiction* – in a noticeably larger black font. Under this second line comes the credit indicating authorship – by Mario Bellatin – in the same olive-green color and a slightly smaller font than the translator character’s name in the main title. The sizing of the three lines that compose the English cover (main title, subtitle, author credit) highlights the merging of fact and fiction at play in the novel, as the protagonist appears more prominently than the real author. The central placement of the subtitle foreshadows the fictive aspect of his persona foregrounded by the word “fiction,” and stands out because of its different color and larger size. At the top of the cover in an even larger font appears Shiki Nagaoka’s name again, this time written in Japanese characters. Paired with the noticeable absence of the actual translator’s name, this inclusion can be read as a playful way to continue upending authorial hierarchies. The design of the title on the cover of Bellatin’s novel suggests that its protagonist, Shiki Nagaoka, is in reality the author of the book, possibly titled *A Nose for Fiction*, which in turn would make it a (pseudo)translation from the Japanese. While the order and size of the names as they appear on the title page usually indicate a hierarchy that tends to erase the translator’s intervention,¹³ the absence of David Shook’s name on the cover of the book elevates translation by rendering it akin to creative writing, posing Mario Bellatin not as the novel’s author but rather as its translator. This is maintained in the novel itself. Towards the end, a metaliterary reference is made about a “certain Mexican writer” – Bellatin as a character – who was able to decode Shiki Nagaoka’s seemingly untranslatable work¹⁴ – Bellatin as a translator. The conflation of writing and translating will reappear in Shook’s translator preface where, as we shall see, the English translator plays an authoritative and authenticating role in keeping with Bellatin’s literary forgery continuing the farce of having Nagaoka pass as a real author.

¹³ Hermans, “The Translator’s Voice”, 26.

¹⁴ Bellatin, *Shiki Nagaoka*, 42.



Figures 1 and 2. Cover images courtesy of Deep Vellum/Phoneme Media and Penguin Random House/Sudamericana.

Petersen's *El traductor del Ulises* is followed by the longer subtitle *Salas Subirat. La desconocida historia del argentino que tradujo la obra maestra de Joyce* [Salas Subirat. The unknown story of the Argentine who translated Joyce's masterpiece]. Located at the very top of its cover (see Figure 2), the main title occupies a central space in a sizable font with the subtitle aligned to the left in a smaller print. José Salas Subirat is first introduced by his occupation, but complying with Petersen's visibilizing efforts, he is promptly named. Both his profession and name appear in the same orange color. *Ulises* is displayed prominently in a larger blue font becoming a focal point in the cover design suggesting the interest in Salas Subirat's story lies not precisely in that he was a translator, but in that he translated this particular book. The contrast between "unknown" and "masterpiece" in the subtitle emphasizes the unexpectedness of his literary pairing with the Irish author. Furthermore, in the Spanish, *historia* could be translated as

either “story” or “history,” which brings about issues germane to the boundaries between the two in any biography, especially one that is also mediated by yet another authorial voice. Lucas Petersen’s name appears right below the main title creating multilayered readings of authorship: Joyce wrote a masterpiece, Salas Subirat rewrote it in translation, and Petersen wrote a book about it and its translator.

A picture of Salas Subirat purposefully illustrates the cover design of the biography by Petersen, countering the literal invisibility that had fed the elusiveness of this extraordinary character and his unbelievable undertaking, for up until a couple of years ago there were no published photographs of him.¹⁵ A valuable resource in the biography is the included sample of archival photographs that show Salas Subirat in different capacities: as a family man, an insurance agent, a public speaker, and as Joyce’s translator. The latter is also displayed in scans of his copy of *Ulysses*, which he annotated in pencil for his first translation and in ink for the revised edition, leaving traces of the process of his work. For example, Petersen notes that in the passage on Simbad the Sailor, Salas Subirat’s markings indicate an effort (and surrender) to translate a play on words. The reproduction of one of his edited manuscript pages appears superimposed on the cover of the book, completing its design.

Salas Subirat’s portrait that acts as the cover image is also included in the photographic section of the biography. It is a black and white picture that shows him as a young man, and Petersen’s epigraph places him on a trip in Montevideo, Uruguay. He appears to be on a ship, he is wearing a hat, and he seems to be holding a cigarette. For the book cover, the same image was however intervened. His suit and tie were colored in a blue and orange respectively that match the colors in the title, and the cigarette, replaced by a copy of his translation of *Ulysses*. This book featured a modernist illustration in the same chromatic spectrum, with the title *Ulises* in a large blue font and the name of the author, James Joyce, atop in orange. This design clearly served as inspiration for Petersen’s own book cover, which pays tribute to Salas Subirat’s by reproducing it, using the same colors, sizing, and placement for its title. The analogous pattern extends the parallels between the novel’s

¹⁵ Petersen, “José Salas Subirat”.

translator and its protagonist to Petersen's and Joyce's shared authorial intentions i.e., making the marginal central by telling the story of a common man, adding an extra layer of fictionalization to the narrative. Taken in 1926, according to Petersen's record, the photograph took place some twenty years before the publication of Salas Subirat's translation, which makes of the cover image not only a fake picture, but by holding his own book, an impossible one. The use of image-editing software questions how trustworthy easily falsifiable resources such as photographs can be in supporting the veracity of history and in validating its faithful reproduction, for "if the paratext is concerned with authorial mediation it is also open to the possibility of manipulation."¹⁶

Photography plays a key role in Bellatin's novel too. In fact, the book is a photo novella, with images composing half of the narrative. The "iconographic recuperation of Shiki Nagaoka's life"¹⁷ is adjudicated to Ximena Berecochea (a real photographer) and includes pictures of his family, places where he spent time at, items of clothing and kitchenware, books and salvaged manuscripts, as well as certain everyday objects he used to cope with his nasal deformity, such as a nose wringer, a hand mirror, and a special apparatus he used for writing "without being bothered by his nose."¹⁸ In the novel, Nagaoka is equally interested in literature as he is in photography. The latter stems from his translational approach to writing, including pictures in his texts that "instantly *reproduced* what the words and ideograms were so pressed to represent."¹⁹ After a convoluted writing career and stay at a monastery, he established a tiny photography kiosk where he spent the rest of his life selling and developing rolls of film. Only a few of his photographs that have been conserved show the image of Shiki Nagaoka, who systematically appears blurred or darkened, present yet invisible and indiscernible. This elusiveness offers a commentary on Bellatin's parodic use of photography. Destabilizing its documentary capacities, the real photographs that accompany the text, but are spuriously allotted to Bellatin's fictional character, contribute to his

¹⁶ Bushel, "Paratext or Imagetext?", 182.

¹⁷ Bellatin, *Shiki Nagaoka*, 46.

¹⁸ Bellatin, *Shiki Nagaoka*, 74.

¹⁹ Bellatin, *Shiki Nagaoka*, 15 (emphasis added).

experimental writing project on modes of literary representation that question the boundaries between fact and fiction.²⁰ One of the clearest pictures of Shiki Nagaoka is a portrait that shows him in profile. The photograph is however damaged, seemingly discolored by bleach, erasing his distinctive nose from the picture. The epigraph informs it was “*manipulated* by his sister Etsuko for the purposes of avoiding that the author be considered a fictional character.”²¹ This visual paratext, which was used as the cover in the Spanish original publication of Bellatin’s novel, once more challenges veritable forms of representation. Photography, like translation, can be tampered with and intervened, and resist the expectation of a faithful reproduction of an original. While the nose remains inaccessible in the Spanish cover, it appears front and center in the English version, in the form of a Japanese style illustration i.e., as an artistic, mediated representation. Reinforcing the upending of authorial hierarchies and testing the boundaries between fact and fiction once more, the image is a metaliterary reference to Shiki Nagaoka as a writer, who had “two large notebooks: one where he wrote his works of fiction, and another where he collected his memories. The latter had a drawing of a giant nose on its cover.”²²

Both Mario Bellatin and Lucas Petersen make use of a photographic archive, an authenticating and validating resource in biographical accounts. In their works, however, photography is used as a malleable medium serving a purpose beyond its traditional illustrative function. The photographs have been shown to support the veracity of their research while simultaneously aiding in the construction of their narratives as fiction.

Salas Subirat used the language of photography to account for what he believed to be the unrivaled genius of Joyce’s epic, i.e., its sense of simultaneity. According to the translator, the Joycean prose was able, like a camera lens (and unlike the human eye), to capture and focus on many images at the same time. This muddy analogy was part of Salas Subirat’s translator note, which prefaced the first two editions

²⁰ Brizuela, *Depois da fotografia*, 27.

²¹ Bellatin, *Shiki Nagaoka*, 68 (emphasis added).

²² Bellatin, *Shiki Nagaoka*, 33.

of his translation, but was subsequently replaced by a more scholarly prologue by Jacques Mercanton. In his note, Salas Subirat expounds his translation strategies through multiple examples from the text, concluding that *Ulysses* did not present serious translation challenges. The claim responds not to a boastful display on part of the translator, but rather to his belief that there are as many possible translations as there are readings of any given text. Endeavoring to translate such a polyphonic work, Salas Subirat favored translation as the manipulation of a language that is flexible and pledged fidelity not to words, but to Joyce's ideas, steering clear of a literal approach. Some of his translation solutions were more successful than others and would receive a fair amount of criticism, but his exploits remain an achievement that gained him a well-deserved epithet. After surviving the accident that destroyed his third unpublished manuscript, a Venezuelan newspaper's headline announced: "Avión donde venía *el traductor de Ulises* cayó al mar frente a las playas de São Paulo" [Plane carrying *the translator of Ulysses* fell into the sea in front of the São Paulo beaches].²³

Yet while for many, Salas Subirat's worth lies in the titanic challenge of his translational enterprise, in Petersen's biography, it is not until the fourth of five parts that Salas Subirat's translation is discussed. The chapters devoted to the translation of *Ulysses* – arguably the very reason for the existence of Petersen's book – are postponed for some two hundred pages. The previous three parts may effectively be read as paratextual material that contextualizes Salas Subirat and allows readers to reconcile his persona to his version of Joyce's novel. Petersen redirects the attention from the translation to the translator by highlighting his other achievements: "Todo lo que antecede a estas líneas podría ser casi un prólogo para lo que significa Salas Subirat para la industria del seguro. Lo mismo si se reconstruyera su aporte pionero a la historia de la literatura de autoayuda en la Argentina" [Everything that precedes these lines could almost work as a prologue to what Salas Subirat has meant to the insurance industry. Likewise if we were to reconstruct his pioneering contribution to the history of self-

²³ Petersen, *El traductor*, 349 (emphasis added).

help literature in Argentina].²⁴ Throughout the book, Salas Subirat's persona is constructed as a curious learner, an enthusiastic entrepreneur, a simple man of eclectic interests who appreciated a challenge. He translated *Ulysses* because he wanted to read it, and Petersen's lengthy and detailed introduction to his life gives way to an understanding of the translator's task as Salas Subirat expressed it in his translator's note: translation as the most careful, attentive way of reading. Salas Subirat's resolution to translate Joyce in such a way is only paralleled by Petersen's determination to document his achievement, perhaps confirming, in the case of the translator just as in that of the biographer, that indeed "a writer necessarily identifies, both consciously and unconsciously, with the figure whose life he studies."²⁵

Understood as a commentary on the original, translations were considered to be part of its paratextual structure in Gérard Genette's theorization of paratexts. The development of translation studies as a discipline has since moved away from a conceptualization of translation as dependent on, and subservient to, an original. The translation of Mario Bellatin's novel serves here as a primary text that reads anew. This English version is introduced by David Shook's translator's preface. By making use of the traditional discursive practices expected of prefatorial materials, it successfully contributes to the fabrication of Shiki Nagaoka's character. Shook's text results in a creative authorial intervention that could work as another chapter in Bellatin's literary forgery. Moreover, it adds to the novel's thematic depiction of translating as writing, continuing to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, original and translation, production and reproduction. Framing the reading of Bellatin's book, it is in fact Shook who characterizes it as a biographical account ("I am honored to have ushered Mario Bellatin's biography of the great Shiki Nagaoka") and hopes his translation will help tackle Nagaoka's detractors who believed his story to be "too incredible to be true."²⁶ A discussion by the translator of other available translations and copyright issues completes the preface and its illusion

²⁴ Petersen, *El traductor*, 325.

²⁵ Baron, "Psychological Dimensions of the Biographical Process", 5.

²⁶ Bellatin, *Shiki Nagaoka*, 5.

of veracity. Shook acts as an accomplice to Bellatin, who utilizes analogous literary antics including as paratexts a selected bibliography of apocryphal works by and about Shiki Nagaoka, forging his supposed authenticity and establishing his role as author.

The recent upsurge in the publication of academic works, memoirs and biographies, and literary fiction centered around translators has brought forth the importance of this figure in our current world while bringing to the fore its longstanding invisibility. The newly depiction of translators can challenge commonplace assumptions about their task, which results in tension between fact and fiction, reality and its representation. A comparable tension has occurred traditionally between an original and its translation, when the latter is expected to replicate the former. Taking a look at how the work of translators has been portrayed, whether in historiographical or fictional accounts, allows us to reimagine the translator's task. The destabilization of authorial hierarchies and the dislocation of discursive authority in *El traductor del Ulises* by Lucas Petersen and in *Shiki Nagaoka: Una nariz de ficción* by Mario Bellatin put forward an understanding of translation not in terms of faithful reproduction of an original but as a creative exercise imbued with agency. The biography of a translator with parallels to a work of fiction and a novel about a fictional translator that passes for the biography of a real one, both books make a productive use of the tension between reality and its literary rendering. Contributing to their thematic blurring of one and the other, their respective paratexts additionally and purposefully confound translating with writing. In Petersen's book, there is a deliberate effort to have Salas Subirat's biography cover image resemble that of his translation. The use of image-editing software to tamper with one of the biographer's archival finds questions photography's representational capabilities. In Bellatin's novel, real photographs that are falsely adjudicated contribute to his forging of a fictional biography, which passes for a real one precisely because it makes credible use of the expected paratextual materials of the genre. Another of such materials in its English version is the translator's preface, which simultaneously follows and defies the formal conventions of this paratext. While often paratexts will rely on authorial approval, they also help expand and situate works within a

larger literary industry, where editors and marketing departments play an important and decisive role. For example, *Shiki Nagaoka: A Nose for Fiction* will soon be rereleased by Deep Vellum Books with a new cover illustration and design, including this time the translator's name. As critical and literary works continue engaging in the visibilization of the translator, so too will their figure increasingly occupy spaces that had repeatedly omitted them. Tending to these paratextual structures illuminates the role the framing of these narratives can play in rethinking the translator's task in their biographical and fictional renderings.

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