

# THE STRIPPED FISH: TRANSLATION AND CULTURE IN MARIO BELLATIN'S JAPANESE NOVELLAS\*

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## 666 MARIO BELLATIN'S ARTISTIC PROJECT

The Mexican-Peruvian author Mario Bellatin is currently one of Latin America's leading artists, whose literary work echoes the experiments of the avant-garde. Initially, he became known for his unconventional treatment of key figures from European conceptualism in the visual arts, and in particular for his references to Marcel Duchamp (for example, in *El Gran Vidrio*, 2007) and Joseph Beuys (in *Lecciones para una liebre muerta*, 2006).<sup>1</sup> As I will try to make clear, however, Bellatin adopts many other strategies to break through the stereotyped patterns of present-day artistic creation. One of these is the striking use of what Heather Cleary calls "the translational trope of textual reproduction" (123), which she considers characteristic of cultural production in Latin America, and of which pseudotranslation is a noticeable example.

Following the example of Andrea Cote-Botero, Bellatin's view of literary production can be described as "procedural," which comes down to the creative process itself being regarded as the most important artistic product, causing the latter to be subject to constant change. To Bellatin, artistic activity is all-encompassing and determines one's everyday life; therefore, there is no clear dividing line between his literary universe and his daily existence. Moreover, to him, making art transcends the literary field; rather, it is a powerful dynamic, an ambitious project, in which texts, visual material and public interventions come together into one great, constantly evolving performance.

In the last few years, Bellatin's work has become part of the transnational canon, anchored in a position that is both local and global. On the one hand, Latin America is indisputably his base and locus of enunciation: in 2000, he founded the *Dynamic Writers School* of Mexico City, which he ran until it closed in 2010. His distinctive

ideas on literature were evident from the guidelines he gave his students: they were not allowed to write, in other words, were not allowed to produce texts, but had to restrict themselves to careful observation. He also works with visual artists from Latin America, such as Ximena Berecochea, who supplied the photographs for one of the novellas I will be discussing, *Nagaoka Shiki*. He writes first and foremost for a Latin American readership, and his books are dense with references to local figures and events. At the same time, he presents himself as an avid cosmopolitan who draws on many diverse cultural traditions, such as Sufism, Judaism, and Japanese literature. The result of this double positioning—both Latin American and international—is that Bellatin incorporates well-known themes in a completely new way and brings together the most diverse cultural references. An example of this is his 2005 text *Lecciones para una liebre muerta* (*Lessons for a Dead Hare*, translated by Daniel Alarcón in *A Public Space*, No. 5, 2008), in which Joseph Beuys appears with Bruce Lee, José María Arguedas, and a number of Peruvian *danzaqs*.

A question arises as to this author's position within the global literary market and the unequal division of symbolic capital that prevails there, more specifically in relation to the factors that determine which works are included in World Literature, such as the novels of Bolaño, to give a good Latin American example, and which ones are not (see Apter; Casanova; Hoyos). Although Bellatin resists being incorporated into the streamlined system of the World Republic of Letters, and his work is too idiosyncratic to fit into this system, he has managed to secure a place in a particular niche of World Literature that is somewhat comparable to that of the Argentine César Aira. A number of his works have already been translated into English by independent publishers, such as *Salón de Belleza* (*Beauty Salon*), *Nagaoka Shiki: una nariz de ficción* (*Shiki Nagaoka: A Nose for Fiction*), and *Jacobo el Mutante* (*Jacob the Mutant*), and there are more projects in the future. However, these English translations are only the tip of the iceberg as they concern translation to another language as a form of consecration (see Casanova). But those who look more closely at the source texts will conclude that translation plays a central role here as well. The original texts are often presented as translations, consist of different modalities of translation, and/or treat translation as a theme. Therefore, Bellatin, following Borges, does not think of translation primarily as a derivative, but as a basic mechanism inherent in every form of text production, and therefore underpinning literary texts *an sich*.

In order to grasp the importance of translation and the way it functions in this dialectic between the local and the global levels, I will look at two of Bellatin's "'Japanese' stories,"<sup>2</sup> *El jardín de la señora Murakami* (*Mrs. Murakami's Garden*, 2000, not yet translated into English), and *Nagaoka Shiki: una nariz de ficción* (*Shiki Nagaoka: A Nose for Fiction*, 2001, translated by David Shook, 2012). They may be read as contemporary rewritings of Borges's famous essay "El escritor argentino y la tradición." This essay proposes the idea that one can contribute more to one's own cultural identity by taking otherness, not the *couleur locale*, as a starting point for that which is one's own; or, in other words, by radically deterritorializing that which is one's own.

In these two novellas, we see translators at work: *El jardín* is a fictional translation of a non-existent literary text, whereas *Nagaoka Shiki* is interpreted as a fake biography of a non-existent writer-translator. In both cases, the writing process is inextricably bound up with translation, creating added literary value. At the same time we see that the author figure is, as it were, erased. In his place, a translator, biographer, publisher, or compiler comes to the fore.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the different translation processes enable Bellatin to make a statement about the international circulation of artworks, which is always rooted in local thinking about identity: the stereotypes about Japan, as Bellatin presents them, are the fruits of Western imagination, and say much more about the West itself than they do about the oriental “other.” By putting a distant civilization at centre stage, Bellatin forces his readers to consider prevailing exotic and essentialist clichés that surround their own Latin American culture.

## 668 *EL JARDÍN DE LA SEÑORA MURAKAMI: A PSEUDOTRANSLATION*<sup>4</sup>

Bellatin presents his 2000 novella *El jardín de la señora Murakami* to the reader as a translation of a found manuscript, a tried and tested method in literary history which, if applied in an orthodox manner, lends the text authority. The proper name “Murakami” immediately evokes associations with the well-known Japanese author Haruki Murakami, and with a Japanese setting. The translator’s voice resounds here mainly in the paratextual context, the place in which the pseudotranslation manifests itself as translation, but where in fact the (implied) author is speaking.<sup>5</sup> In that case, three zones can be marked in which we hear the (pseudo)translator’s voice: the title, the footnotes (37 in total), and a series of 24 “addenda” or endnotes taking up three full pages. This epilogue immediately follows the Japanese end word “Otsumuru,” which has been given an explanatory note (note 37). Underneath the Spanish title appears a title that looks like the original Japanese: “Oto No-Murakami monogatari.” This title literally means “Story of the Murakami of the sound,”<sup>6</sup> which is in fact nonsensical, a first dissonant chord. For readers who do not know Japanese, this imitation of the Japanese language reinforces the impression of authenticity. From his comments in the footnotes, which are intended to sound erudite, it appears that the translator is trying to get a grip on the text, but does not succeed in doing so. Some of his additions are relatively neutral and somewhat illuminating, but in many cases, it is merely arbitrary and irrelevant. This applies in particular to the endnotes included in the “addendum,” some of which are so hilarious that it becomes clear that we are dealing with an apocryphal translation.

The story deals with the clash between proponents of the indigenous culture and supporters of Western modernization in countries such as Japan, but also elsewhere, such as in Peru and Mexico. The story is set in a non-specified Asian country. Because of the references to historical periods such as the Meiji era or the Kamakura period,

proper names such as Murakami, Izu, Shikibu, and Etsuko, and *realia* (see below), and its geography as an island somewhere in the Far East, the reader identifies the setting with Japan, though it is later revealed to be a different location (*El jardín* 168). The main character, the ambitious Izu, cares for her sick father and studies art history. One day she publishes a very critical article about the private collection of the rich Mr. Murakami, whom she unmasks as a dilettante. What Izu does not realize at that moment is that she is caught in the middle of a conflict between two rival clans at the university, the radical traditionalists led by Professor Takagashi, and the ultramoderns led by Matsuei Kenzo, who try to settle their accounts through her. She embodies metaphorically, as it were, the tensions between tradition and renewal, and under pressure from these circumstances, she changes sides. The polemics brought about by the article cause Izu to become entangled in the snares of Mr. Murakami, who blackmails her and avenges himself on her by asking her to marry him, a proposal she cannot refuse according to local customs. At the end of the story, Mr. Murakami dies, and Izu, now Mrs. Murakami, is left destitute, humiliated, and without any future. Her defeat is symbolized by the story's tragic opening scene, which begins *in medias res* as before her very eyes, workmen dismantle the traditional garden that Mr. Murakami has had designed at her request. This garden has degenerated into a cruel tool of vengeance: since the spirit of her deceased husband is still roaming there, Izu has no choice but to destroy that which is dearest to her.

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This story evokes an unmistakably Japanese atmosphere through an abundance of examples of Japanese refinement and ritualization, and the stereotypical portrayal of the characters as extremely restrained and discreet in their gestures and actions. Descriptions of well-known elements from Japanese tradition, such as certain garments (kimonos), eating habits (the daily ritual of serving tea), interiors, garden design, games (the *go* board, a game that is similar to chess), literary art (haiku), the extreme importance attached to loyalty within the family circle, and the subservience of women to their husbands or that of servants to their masters are meant to create an *effet de réel*. This effect is reinforced by several explicit references to important texts from Japanese literary tradition, in particular to Tanizaki Junichiro's famous essay from 1933 on Japanese aesthetics, *In Praise of Shadows* (*El jardín* 166, 169). Junichiro's work is the only book that Izu is allowed to take into her arranged marriage after having to leave behind her entire library.<sup>7</sup> The writing style imitates what some readers may associate with Japanese literature: elliptical, stripped of unnecessary frills, and understated. The restrained façade of this stylized Japan is opposed to the complex world of human relations. For Izu, all the masks fall off when her husband, on his deathbed, yearns after her servant, with whom he has had a secret relationship for years. The apparent simple distinction between "true" and "false" that is continuously evoked in the text, in such phrases as "*falso coleccionista*" ("false collector," *El jardín* 145), "*la verdadera historia del arte del país*" ("the true history of the art of peace," *El jardín* 148), and "*entender la verdadera esencia del arte moderno*" ("to understand the true essence of modern art," *El jardín* 152; all emphasis mine), is

completely obscured by this dénouement. Nothing appears to be what it seems. This also applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the text we are reading, because here, too, there is a very fine line between what is true and false.

Moreover, the entire narrative construction is undermined by the ironic interventions of the pseudotranslator, which give Izu's failed emancipation an additional satirical dimension. Thus, the footnotes explain to the Western reader not only unfamiliar words such as "Kohatsu" (*El jardín* 150, footnote 17), a kind of rodent; but also well-known words such as "formica" (*El jardín* 145, footnote 13), "kimono," (*El jardín* 136, footnote 2) and "sushi" (*El jardín* 159, footnote 26), or historical names from the art world, such as Francis Bacon (*El jardín* 145, footnote 14), whereas a less obvious term such as "jiru-mitsubar" (*El jardín* 157) is not explained. We also learn that the author has made up several of the so-called typical but extravagant rituals, such as "Formotón Asai" (*El jardín* 181, footnote 36) or "suppenka" (*El jardín* 179, footnote 35). The order of the notes is also illogical, so that the reader gradually develops a

670 feeling of unease, as if he/she is being fooled.

The translator is completely carried away in the endnotes, which are irrelevant content-related glosses (*El jardín* 184-86). He criticizes the structure of the story (see e.g. endnote 5), presents the reader with irrelevant speculations such as his suggestion that the beauty of the site of the Murakami Museum was supposedly the direct result of Mr. Murakami's act of revenge against his wife (footnote 24), or signals so-called gaps in the text, such as Mr. Murakami's driving licence (endnote 8). Because these comments are exaggerated, they not only add nothing substantial, but also ridicule all efforts to find a deeper meaning in the text, which therefore begins to look more and more like a parody.

What is the function of such a pseudotranslation? In their introduction to the special issue of *Interférences Littéraires* on pseudotranslation, Tom Toremans and Beatrijs Vanacker suggest the following:

Based in an aesthetic of imitation, pseudotranslations can also exert a critical function towards the (original or translated) literary production of a certain period. As simulacrum, (fictional) pseudotranslations also provide a unique mode of representing and/or commenting on prevailing literary practices, and it is this metafictional dimension of pseudotranslations that we aim to address in this special issue. (5)

Pseudotranslations, therefore, by definition contain a metaliterary message. Bellatin is not concerned with camouflage: he makes it so obvious that the reader begins to understand the game he is playing. But what is his concern? Gideon Toury defines pseudotranslations as "texts which have been presented as translations with no corresponding source texts in other languages ever having existed" (40). Toury's definition starts from a text-centered model, in which pseudotranslation is seen as property of a text. Brigitte Rath, on the other hand, explores the intriguing phenomenon of pseudotranslation as a mode of reading, which implies a "double refraction [...] already built into a text" (Rath). In "Translations with No Original: Scandals of Textual Reproduction," Emily Apter goes a step further, preferring to speak of "tex-

tual cloning” rather than “pseudotranslation.” She explains the difference as follows:

Pseudotranslation versus textual cloning: two paradigms that address problematic originality in the field of translation studies, two paradigms that are conceptually related, but emphasize distinctly different problems and questions. My particular interest here will be in exploring what the concept of textual cloning might bring to the age-old discussion of textual fidelity in translation studies, how it shifts the terms of translation studies, from original and translation, to clone and code. (214)

In other words, the focus shifts from textual veracity to the conditions of the original’s reproducibility. The result is that the whole concept of originality as an essentialist category becomes subject to dispute. In this context, Heather Cleary’s position is also interesting, as she believes that Apter underestimates the subversive potential of “the metaphor of translation as cloning” (130). She emphasizes the possible derailment that accompanies genetic cloning, a derailment she sees not as a “failure,” but rather as a “constitutive part of the cloning process” (136) and which therefore can be seen as positive: “[t]his deviation is ultimately the key to establishing a positive valence for the metaphor of cloning in the theory of translation developed throughout the narrative” (134).

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The examples Cleary discusses are those of the Brazilian Luis Fernando Veríssimo and the Argentine César Aira, but Bellatin’s work provides a similar scenario. *El jardín* is in the first instance about the fabrication of a text out of the codes of “Japaneseness,” in translation, that is, “cloning from code” (Apter 221). The author shows not only how powerful such codes are, but also how they reduce reality. A few references suffice to mislead the reader. Due to the overdetermination and hyperbole, the effect is the opposite: a derailment that automatically leads to a deconstruction. At the same time we are dealing with a subversion of originality and a proposal for creative appropriation, the weapons *par excellence* of less central cultures such as those of Latin America. The translator assumes far-reaching powers and evolves into a creator of fiction, so that the distinction between translator and author begins to blur. Bellatin’s view of literature is based on creating a large intertextual network within which the import and export of other texts takes place continuously. Even within his own oeuvre, he follows a method that is linked to the technique of cloning: motifs and images from particular texts are grafted onto others, characters mutate from one story to another, and partitions between different narratives are removed.

In a haunting scene, the omnipotent narrator describes an evening meal that Izu and Murakami share in a restaurant outside the city after their wedding, in which they eat a live fish.<sup>8</sup> The ceremony prescribes that the meal last exactly as long as the poor animal’s struggle with death, a custom which is in fact fictitious. It is a telling but cruel image that foreshadows the sad fate awaiting Mrs. Murakami. However, we may also read it as a metafictional comment on how Bellatin strips away the complexity of culture:<sup>9</sup> he shows us the skeleton, the structure of the so-called “authenticity” of the East, which on closer inspection is based on stereotypical, exoticizing patterns. Its basis is formed by his own experience of reading Japanese literature, which is the

product of translation.

At first sight we seem to be far from Latin America, but it only appears that way, because, ultimately, *El jardín* is indirectly about the position of other cultures believed to be peripheral in the contemporary cultural space. From the beginning of his literary career, Bellatin opposed the artificial categories that are constantly projected onto Latin American literature: the contrast between so-called “international authors” such as García Márquez, Vargas Llosa, and Carlos Fuentes on the one hand, and a more regional movement on the other, one that is supposed to be more socially engaged, of which writers such as José María Arguedas and Juan Rulfo are the most famous examples. Furthermore, Bellatin shuns all conventional and traditional themes, has never written a novel on dictatorship, and distances himself from magical realism and everything that is typically associated with Latin American literary culture. From that perspective, it should not be surprising that he prefers unexpected locations that may not be very familiar to Western readers, as is evident from another

672 of his Japanese novellas, *Nagaoka Shiki, una nariz de ficción* (*Shiki Nagaoka: A Nose for Fiction*, 2012).

## NAGAOKA SHIKI: UNA NARIZ DE FICCIÓN: THE MAKING OF WORLD LITERATURE

*Nagaoka Shiki: una nariz de ficción*<sup>10</sup> is not a pseudotranslation in the strict sense of the word, but a pseudobiography. The protocols Bellatin uses and the “scenography”<sup>11</sup> he constructs are, however, analogous. As in *El jardín*, particular rhetoric and themes generally presumed to belong to Japan are imitated fictitiously, complete with paratexts in which a fictitious bibliography and a photo portfolio are used to guarantee the authenticity of the sources. Neither *Nagaoka Shiki*, the writer who is the subject of the biography, nor his work ever existed, although the character is based on a retelling of “The Nose” (1916), a story by Akutagawa Ryunosuke, which in turn goes back to a thirteenth-century text that was passed down anonymously. These source texts are revealed in the epigraphs immediately following the title. Moreover, the protagonist’s apocryphal work consists of “back-translations,” which is connected to his view of literature, as will become clear later. More than once, the suggestion is made that what we are reading is actually a translation. For that reason, I think it is relevant to discuss this novella here. As a strategy, pseudotranslation does not stand alone and should not be isolated from other techniques that may be used by an author to make a particular point, in this case commenting on the cultural stereotypes ascribed to Latin America and the hierarchical centre/periphery structure of the literary field.

The idea for *Nagaoka Shiki: una nariz de ficción* came to Bellatin as a result of a practical joke.<sup>12</sup> During a press conference, a journalist asked who had most influenced him. The author made up the name Shiki Nagaoka, but the journalist thought



this was the name of a writer who really existed. To give substance to the story, Bellatin decided to write an apocryphal biography of this fictitious character.

This bizarre novella describes the evolution of the aesthetic project of a fictional Japanese writer from the first half of the twentieth century. His most noticeable feature is his extremely oversized nose.<sup>13</sup> Japan is not mentioned until the very end; the story is set on the non-existent peninsula of Ikeno. Even so, the characters have Japanese-sounding names and draw on Japanese culture. According to a well-known stereotype in Japan, a large nose is a sign of Western ancestry; for this reason, Nagaoka's defect is believed to be a punishment for the foreign ideas with which his parents were infatuated and serves as a synecdoche that connotes "being Western." The story is filled with irony, and ridicules the cliché of the artist as a misunderstood genius.<sup>14</sup> The photo section of the novella is supposed to reinforce the "authenticity" of the story but has exactly the opposite effect. The most flagrant example is the class photo, in which the circled face of Nagaoka is so out of focus that the reader is unable to discern any details.

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At a young age, Nagaoka began to write stories in foreign languages, mainly English and French, which he then back-translated into his mother tongue. He did not do this out of a particular interest in Western literature; on the contrary, he called himself a traditionalist and refused to allow foreign influences into his texts. In Chapter III of *La condición traductora*, "El estilo de Mario Bellatin: traducción y neutralidad" ("The Style of Mario Bellatin: Translation and Neutrality"), Martín Gaspar rightly states that for Nagaoka, translating was the ultimate way of withdrawing from the discussion of tradition and modernity and not having to take a stance. What interested him in the experiment to convert a text written in the Latin alphabet into Eastern ideograms, apart from the possibility of seeing whether his texts would hold firm in a different semiotic system, was the option of "unmarked writing" (Gaspar 131). Nagaoka wrote about this paradoxical practice in his essay "Tratado de la lengua vigilada" ("Treatise on the Observed Language"), in which he defended the view that by writing through translation, one lays bare the essence of literature, which, according to him, is not embedded in language.<sup>15</sup> It is not stated explicitly where this essence may be found, but it is suggested that one must strip a text of language-specific rhetoric and the author's personality in order to retain its essence, consisting of a solid plot, a logical composition, and a narrative perspective. Only when a text passes the translation test can it truly claim to be "literature" and, more specifically, "universal literature." As Martín Gaspar remarks, we are dealing with a paradox of format here: if everything that flows from Nagaoka's pen looks like a translation, then these translations are without a source text and therefore not real translations, which turns "originality" into an empty concept (Gaspar 117).

Furthermore, Bellatin seems to be saying that, in a postmodern world, even the most traditional text irrevocably takes on the form of a translation. Authenticity is an illusion in the same way as authorship is, because all writing to a certain extent is translated writing. This is also evident from Nagaoka's subsequent career: despite his



own statements, his contemporaries label his work as “Western.” This is the case with, for example, the large novel he writes after entering a Buddhist monastery. Originally intended as a male rewriting of the Japanese classic *The Tale of Genji*, the final product most resembles a Japanese version of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, to the great displeasure of the author, who finds this an unbearable thought (*Nagaoka* 203).

Nevertheless, Nagaoka does not give up hope of doing something groundbreaking within the limits of his tradition. Eventually, he manages to do this, when he leaves the monastery after thirteen years. Increasingly intrigued by photography, he decides to open a small photo kiosk. This occupation eventually leads him to publish the book *Fotos y palabras* (*Photos and Words*), which is soon distributed around the world and influences a wide range of artists, including the Japanese film director Yasujiro Ozu, the Mexican Juan Rulfo (1917-86) and the Peruvian José María Arguedas (1911-69). Rulfo, too, was a well-known photographer, whereas Arguedas, according to Bellatin, wrote in the diary he left behind that a combination of photography and narrative elements considerably increased the possibilities of reality itself (*Nagaoka* 211),<sup>16</sup> even though he does not specify what Nagaoka exactly proposes in *Photos and Words*.<sup>17</sup> Unlike in *El jardín*, in which it is up to the reader to establish the connection with Latin America, in *Nagaoka Shiki* Bellatin explicitly refers to his own origins. The novella also deals with a different mode of translation that is no longer interlinguistic, but intersemiotic, from word to image.

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At the end of his life, Nagaoka was to realize a curious achievement: he had written a completely untranslatable book, composed in a language of his own invention (*Nagaoka* 216), whose title was a non-existing symbol—which in itself is a way of separating literature from a specific time or place. This work brought him admirers from all over the world. Scholars (“nagaokistas”) from Paris to Mexico were racking their brains as to how this book, which achieved true cult status, could be deciphered. Both in Europe and America, and also in Japan, the realization grew that Nagaoka’s oeuvre is truly universal: “Parece uno de los pocos escritores que pueden ser entendidos de una manera similar en las distintas regiones del mundo” (*Nagaoka* 217).<sup>18</sup> A Mexican writer was said to be close to breaking the code, and to have traced that the manuscript deals with the relationship between physical disabilities and writing, the metaphysical value of language, and the importance of translating and retranslating texts (*Nagaoka* 217). This writer could easily be Bellatin himself, and the canonization of Nagaoka Shiki looks suspiciously like that of Bolaño and the debate surrounding his posthumous work.

## CONCLUSION

In the two novellas discussed here, Bellatin uses pseudotranslation and associated strategies, such as fictitious back-translation, with two different but related objectives, which are connected to his poetics.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, he wants to show that for

“procedural” authors such as himself, the writing of a text is by definition indebted to the practice of translation, both in the wider sense of the word (intertextuality, conversion of literary codification systems) and in the narrower sense (the movement from concrete source text to target text). To call a text an “original” is, at a given moment, to interrupt that never-ending semiotic chain, because in the last instance, such a text always goes back to a translation, so that the distinction becomes *de facto* irrelevant.

On the other hand, Bellatin uses these techniques to closely examine the hierarchically structured geopolitical relations within the paradigm of World Literature. He makes a direct connection between two literary traditions that are considered peripheral in relation to Europe and the US: the Far East and Latin America. Both stories demonstrate that cosmopolitanism is not necessarily synonymous with one-way traffic, but that local experiments, such as Nagaoka’s photo stories, can influence artistic production in other peripheries such as Latin America. In this way, the local can have a seminal impact, reverting the flow and reshaping World Literature, where wide-ranging literary traditions are constantly making connections and forming new networks. In fact, the entire centre-periphery view is obsolete, and World Literature acts as a multipolar constellation within which wide-ranging literary traditions are constantly forging combinations and forming new networks.

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In *Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel*, and especially in Chapter 5, “On Duchamp and Beuys as Latin American Writers” (157-88), Héctor Hoyos takes Bellatin as an example of an author whose work has significance beyond local and regional contexts. Bellatin and others like him prove that globalization does not necessarily have to lead to cultural homogenization. According to Hoyos, contemporary Latin American literature is extremely diverse and trendsetting, which has implications for the way in which we read and write in today’s globalized world:

The potential consequences for world literature include a complete reorientation of the field. Working against the dominant trend of regarding works from the periphery as derivative, contemporary art-infused writings and criticism from Latin America may well assume a position of creative leadership. Aira and Bellatin are not followers of an aesthetic movement initiated elsewhere, but beacons for emerging global forms. (185)

In other words, World Literature can, to a certain extent, be modelled “*after* Latin Americanism” (Hoyos 9; emphasis in original). Heather Cleary supports this contention: she, too, views the multiple occurrence of the “translational trope” in Latin America as a means to “challenge centrist models of cultural geopolitics and posit lucid, nonhierarchical models of reciprocal influence in this stead” (123).

By inverting, undermining, and bringing together wide-ranging cultural traditions, Bellatin presents himself as a global author *par excellence*, and demonstrates that Latin American literature within this multipolar framework can play a pioneering role as a kind of laboratory of new trends. Translation plays a key role in this phenomenon as it becomes a fundamental mechanism of text production that leads to unexpected, creative results. Sometimes it is about the translation of fragments of

a lost or apocryphal original, as in *El jardín de la señora Murakami*; at other times it is about translation as a technique that reveals the essence of literature, as in *Nagaoka Shiki*; and yet at other times translation creates the condition for the rebirth of texts in other contexts and regions, where they can take on infinitely new, vital forms, also as in *Nagaoka Shiki*.

## NOTES

\* Translated from the Dutch by Aletta Stevens.

1. Critics such as Reinaldo Laddaga, Graciela Speranza, and Florencia Garramuño have commented in detail on the tendency of contemporary Latin American literature to step outside its own borders using many types of intermediality.
2. A series of texts he wrote beginning in 2000. Other stories in this series include *Bola negra*, which also contains footnotes as though it were a pseudotranslation, and *Biografía ilustrada de Mishima*.
3. Questioning the traditional concept of authorship is consistent with one of the renewing functions Venuti has ascribed to pseudotranslation (33-34).
4. The novella was originally published separately by Tusquets (2000) with a cover featuring Japanese imagery.
5. In this context, see also Martens and Vanacker: "Les pseudo-traductions se fondent sur une stratégie de publication particulière, qui accorde une place prépondérante à l'épitéxte et à la façon dont il peut être mis à profit pour donner à lire un texte allochtone comme une traduction d'un texte dont l'original aurait été écrit dans une autre langue" (354).
6. Thanks to Japanologist Luk Van Haute for the information on Japanese language and culture. Tsurumi (131-50) also provides much background information on Japanese *realia*.
7. There are also many implicit references to the Japanese literary canon, but these can be understood only by those who know the culture, not by the average reader. Thus the name of the protagonist, Izu, is taken from the short story "The Dancing Girl of Izu" (1926) by Nobel Prize winner Yasunari Kawabata. Bellatin is an avid reader of Japanese literature, as he has indicated in several interviews; to him, Japan is primarily associated with a reading experience.
8. They eat "carne recién cortada de un pez que regresaban descarnado pero vivo a una pequeña pecera que luego ponían sobre la mesa" (182): the fillets of a fish which, still alive, is put back into its own small bowl placed on the guests' table.
9. Ignacio López Calvo uses this same verb: "He *strips* his fiction from recognizable cultural references" (340). However, he then claims that Bellatin's Japanese novellas ultimately consolidate the image of an exotic Japan, a claim with which I disagree.
10. The novella was first published separately by Editorial Sudamericana (2001) with a cover showing one of the photographs included in the photo section. In the original edition, the title was still *Shiki Nagaoka: una nariz de ficción*, but subsequently Bellatin adapted it to the Japanese custom of placing the surname before the given name.
11. For a clarification of this term by Dominique Maingueneau, see Martens and Vanacker (354).
12. In his preface, translator David Shook goes along with the joke: "I am honored to have ushered Mario Bellatin's biography of the great Shiki Nagaoka, a writer and artist almost entirely unknown to English-language readers, into English for the first time, and it is my hope that this new translation begins to redress his under-acknowledgement as a major influence on contemporary world litera-

ture” (Shiki Nagaoka: *A Nose for Fiction* 5).

13. This is a literary cliché in itself: we may think of *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand or Gogol’s *The Nose*. Moreover, physical defects are an important theme in the work of Bellatin, who himself has only one arm.
14. See Schmukler.
15. “Cuando cumplió quince años, Nagaoka Shiki comenzó a estudiar lenguas extranjeras. En un período asombrosamente corto, logró dominarlas con una destreza admirable. Empezó a redactar entonces sus textos literarios en inglés o francés, para luego pasarlos a su lengua materna. De ese modo, consiguió *que todo lo que saliera de su pluma pareciera una traducción*. Años más tarde, logró poner por escrito las ideas que sustentaron ese ejercicio. En su ensayo *Tratado de la lengua vigilada*, aparecido tardíamente en el año 1962 en Fuguya Press, afirma *que únicamente por medio de la lectura de textos traducidos puede hacerse evidente la real esencia de lo literario, que de ninguna manera, como algunos estudiosos afirman, está en el lenguaje*. Sólo trasladando los relatos de una caligrafía occidental a ideogramas tradicionales es posible conocer las verdaderas posibilidades artísticas de cualquier obra. Extrañamente, pese a ese aparente apego a las lenguas foráneas, Nagaoka Shiki en ningún momento dejó translucir en su trabajo la más mínima influencia de literaturas ajenas. En cada uno de sus textos fue extremadamente fiel a las líneas narrativas propias de su estirpe. Esa devoción sin límites a las prácticas ancestrales, aunque adaptadas a su sistema particular, lo convirtió en un autor poco común en una época en que la gran mayoría de los artistas parecían deslumbrados por las recién descubiertas formas de expresión extranjeras” (*Obra reunida* 200; emphasis mine). English translation by David Shook: “When he turned fifteen, Shiki Nagaoka began to study foreign languages. In an astonishingly short period, he came to master them with admirable skill. He then 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. Years later he was able to put into writing the ideas which inspired that exercise. In his essay ‘Treatise on the Observed Language,’ which appeared much later from Fuguya Press in 1962, he affirms that only by means of reading translated texts does the real essence of the literary, which is, in no way, as some scholars argue, in the language, become evident. Only by transferring the stories from a western orthography into traditional ideograms is it possible to achieve the true artistic possibilities of any work. Strangely, in spite of his apparent attachment to foreign languages, Shiki Nagaoka did not for a single moment allow the minutest influence of other literatures to color his work. In each of his texts, he was remarkably faithful to the narrative structures of his heritage. That ceaseless devotion to ancestral practices, though adapted to his particular system, made him an uncommon author in an era during which most artists were dazzled by newly discovered foreign forms of expression” (*Shiki Nagaoka: A Nose for Fiction* 13-14; emphasis mine).
16. “Por su parte, José María Arguedas escribió en su diario póstumo: ‘Poder ver la realidad modificada no sólo por el lente del fotógrafo, sino por la palabra escrita que acompaña estas imágenes, es un camino que potencia infinitamente las posibilidades narrativas de la propia realidad’” (211). English translation by David Shook: “For his part, José María Arguedas wrote in his posthumously published diary: ‘to be able to see reality modified not only by the lens of the photographer but also by the written word that accompanies those images is a path that infinitely strengthens the narrative possibilities of actual reality’” (*Shiki Nagaoka: A Nose for Fiction* 31).
17. At the same time, it is insinuated that Nagaoka Shiki has plagiarized the entire idea of working with photographs from his famous contemporary Tanizaki Junichiro, with whom he becomes acquainted through his kiosk. Here, too, Borges is never far away, and we can hear the echo of his story “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote.”
18. “It seems one of the few writers that can be understood in a similar way in different regions of the world.”
19. Martens and Vanacker point to the fact that the target culture always plays a deciding role in determining the function of pseudotranslations: “Il n’en reste pas moins que ces procédés se voient forcé-

ment reconfigurés par le système littéraire particulier dans lequel ils s'insèrent et en fonction duquel ils ont été élaborés" (357).

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