

Autofiction as a fictional metaphorical self-translation: The case of Reinaldo Arenas's *El color del verano*

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Abstract

In the past thirty years, autofiction has been at the centre of many literary studies (Alberca 2005/6, 2007; Colonna 1989, 2004; Gasparini 2004; Genette 1982), although only recently in Hispanic literary studies. Despite its many common characteristics with self-translation, no interdisciplinary perspective has ever been offered by academic researchers in Literary nor in Translation Studies. This article analyses how the Cuban author Reinaldo Arenas uses specific methods inherent to autofiction, such as nominal and personal identity exploitation, among others, to translate himself metaphorically into his novel *El color del verano* [The Colour of Summer]. Analysing this novel by drawing on the theory of self-translation sheds light on the intrinsic and extraneous motives behind the writer's decision to use this specific literary genre, as well as the benefits presented to the reader who gains access to the 'interliminal space' of the writer's work as a whole.

Keywords: autofiction, Cuban Revolution, persecution, Reinaldo Arenas, self-translation

What is autofiction?

Literature, by its very nature, can be directly associated with an author's search for an explanation of the self. How autofiction functions within the literary domain has been examined in a number of studies tracking the history of the genre (Alberca 2007; Jones 2009; Pozuelo Yvancos 2010). The first definition of autofiction as 'fictionalization of the self' was offered by Genette when analysing Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* [In Search of Lost Time]

(Genette 1982: 293). Many definitions have been presented for this hybrid literary genre since, but the most appropriate one, in terms of its clarity and simplicity, is that offered by the French academic, Jacques Lecarme: ‘l’autofiction est d’abord un dispositif très simple: soit un récit dont auteur, narrateur et protagoniste partagent la même identité nominale et dont l’intitulé générique indique qu’il s’agit d’un roman’ (1993: 227) [‘Autofiction is first of all a very simple device: it is a narrative whose author, narrator and protagonist share the same nominal identity and whose generic title indicates that it is a novel’].

This definition is broad in the sense that it offers the possibility for many types of autofictions, for which the two extremes would be a realistic version and a fictionalized version. In the first one, close to Doubrovsky’s interpretation of the term (1977), the story told relates directly to the autobiography of the writer but is written in a novelistic way; in the second one, also called ‘figurative autofiction’ (Colonna 2004: 282) or ‘figuration of the self’ (Pozuelo Yvancos 2010: 29), the writer uses his own name, but creates an entirely invented character. Some autofictions will be closer to Lejeune’s autobiographical pact (1989), requiring more of a referential reading; others will likely follow the novelistic pact, suggesting a fictional reading.

The study of autofiction in Hispanic literature is still quite recent, and the most relevant work offering a broad overview is Manuel Alberca’s *El pacto ambiguo* (2007) [The Ambiguous Pact]. Alberca gives numerous examples of what he considers to be autofiction, such as Javier Marías’ *Todas las almas* (1989) [All Souls], Javier Cercas’ *La velocidad de la luz* (2005) [The Speed of Light] and César Aira’s *Cómo me hice monja* (1993) [How I Became a Nun], although the most representative one in terms of our current understanding of autofiction within Hispanic literature is Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (1977) [Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter].

In the 'rough inventory' of Hispanic autofictions offered at the end of his book (2007: 301), Alberca includes the name of the Cuban author Reinaldo Arenas as well as two of his novels, although he omits the one that is possibly the most representative of this literary genre: *El color del verano*. This study will offer a complementary point of view to Alberca's book, with an interdisciplinary analysis of Reinaldo Arenas' novel *El color del verano*, an often ignored example of Latin American autofiction. Despite the surreal character of the novel and the hyperbolic happenings of its plot, this is arguably Arenas's most autobiographical work. The repeated use of these textual strategies enables the creation of a metaphorical self-translation where the author translates his life and memories into a work of fiction.

Analysing Arenas' novel from a Translation Studies perspective will offer a new understanding of the intrinsic and extraneous motives which would prompt an author to opt for such a literary genre, as well as highlighting the benefits for the reader of this type of reading. The aim is to start a new dialogue about autofiction as a fictional metaphorical self-translation.

Autofiction and self-translation: an interdisciplinary perspective

What is self-translation?

Although self-translation is an age-old practice that dates back to the Greco-Roman antiquity (Santoyo 2013: 23), it has become of interest to Translation Studies scholars only recently, in the mid-1980s, almost at the same time as autofiction became a source of interest to the Literary and Life-writing Studies researchers. The most commonly known writers of self-translated works are Samuel Beckett, Milan Kundera, Vladimir Nabokov, Julian Green and André Brink. However, self-translation is also quite common in the Hispanic literary world with Spanish authors such as

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Jorge Semprún and Carme Riera, and Latin American writers such as Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Manuel Puig and Rosario Ferré.

Before discussing the link between self-translation and autofiction, which has not yet been established by scholars of Translation or Literary Studies, it is necessary to provide the first definition given of self-translation. Anton Popovič describes self-translation as ‘the translation of an original work into another language by the author himself’ (in Montini 2010: 306). The most common debate that can be found in studies about self-translation relates to the process of self-translation itself: should a self-translated text be considered as a translation or as a re-writing of the source text? Also, if two versions of one same text exist in two different languages by the same author, which one is supposed to be considered the original? Is there an original? Can either version exist without the other?

Self-translations often do not offer a literal translation of their original, but rather an enriched version that is complementary to the source text. The author of a self-translated text is a privileged translator as he can adapt and improve his text due to the authorial liberty he benefits from during the translation process. Most obvious changes are made when there is a need to adapt the source text to the new audience, as some cultural amendments are necessary. A clear example of this type of amendment is Jorge Semprún’s *Federico Sánchez se despide de ustedes* (Tusquets, 1993) / *Federico Sánchez vous salue bien* (Grasset, 1993) [Federico Sanchez Says Farewell]. The author can also decide to add content, develop characters, offer textual enrichment, as well as make form adaptations, or changes in the tone and rhythm of the text. As stated by Jorge Semprún himself, ‘la libertad del autortraductor es total’ (Grutman 2013: 66) [‘the liberty of the self-translator is complete’]. Nonetheless, as highlighted by Rosario Ferré, ‘the

main thread of the story remains the same' in both languages (in Hokenson and Munson 2007: 203).

To complete our definition, it is also worth mentioning what Anthony Cordingley has called the 'hybridity of the subject of the self-translated text' in the Introduction to the book *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture* (2013: 3). This hybridity seems to be a recurrent trait in autofiction, and will be discussed further at a later point. As Cordingley argues: 'Typically literary scenarios include: [...] characters who are faced with their doubles, identities which morph with the use of different languages [...]. Hybridity characterizes not only many self-translators' external and textual environments, but the internal bilingual and bicultural space out of which their creativity emerges' (2013: 3).

In light of this complex definition of self-translation, it seems relevant to query why an author would resort to translating him or herself. Antunes provides a detailed list of options that can explain the reasons for self-translation, making a difference between intrinsic reasons such as 'the urge to reach a wider audience' (Asaduddin 2008: 236, in Antunes 2013: 47), 'the fear to be misrepresented' (ibid.) and 'the wish to make a political or ideological statement' (Ehrlich 2007: 17, in Antunes 2013: 47); and extraneous reasons such as exile (ibid.), and censorship (Kruger 2008: 6, in Antunes 2013: 47).

Kruger states that according to André Brink, "intrinsic motives" such as the desire to "say" the novel in a new language as well as "extraneous ones" such as refusing to be silenced because of censorship [...], were responsible for his starting the self-translation process that has become his trademark' (Antunes 2013: 46). Kruger adds that self-translation 'can be regarded as a desperate attempt to ensure personal literary survival' (ibid.: 48). In this study it will become clear that very similar reasons can lead an author to write an autofiction.

Autofiction: a metaphorical self-translation?

Despite the fact that the link between self-translation and autofiction has not been established before,¹ it seems clear that the two have a lot in common. As Rita Wilson argues, ‘Self-translation is closely linked to the representation of self’ (2009: 186). Wilson widens the definition of self-translation to its metaphorical extension, where the representation of a writer’s lived experiences into a text can be viewed as a translation of the self, or self-translation, where the source ‘text’ is the writer’s life itself, and the translated text the autobiographical writing. Autofiction could then be considered as a fictional metaphorical self-translation where the writer translates his own life experiences and memories into written language and, more specifically, into a literary text. Richard Kearney’s more generic understanding of translation goes in the same direction:

Translation [...] [i]n the specific sense [...] signals the work of translating the meanings of one particular language into another. In the more generic sense, it indicates the everyday act of speaking as a way not only of translating oneself to oneself (inner to outer, private to public, unconscious to conscious, etc.) but also and more explicitly of translating oneself to others. (Evangelista 2013: 178)

The idea of translating oneself to oneself and oneself to others is how one should also try to interpret autofiction. This translation does not have to be faithful to its original as long as ‘the main thread of the story remains the same’ (Ferré, in Hokenson and Munson 2007: 203). In the literary domain, scholars often also question the faithfulness of autobiographical novels,

documentary novels, and autofictions,² in the sense of how close they are to the real events of the author's life, but one might wonder whether this question really needs to be raised. First of all, do the characteristics of fiction not give the writer the same authorial liberty that self-translators possess? Secondly, as several authors state (Bateson 1972; Cade 1980; Delgado 1989; Watzlawick *et al.* 1967; Watzlawick 1976), there is no single truth or authentic reality, but different interpretations of facts depending on the position of the storyteller in the context of interest. Autobiographical writing enables the translation of the author's life experiences into a text, through his/her own interpretation and memory of those, which are influenced by the author's personal framework, also called by Bourdieu the writer's initial habitus (in Meylaerts 2011).³ Therefore it would be extremely difficult, and somewhat pointless, to demonstrate the faithfulness of a metaphorical self-translation.

The study: Reinaldo Arenas' *El color del verano*

Although Reinaldo Arenas never self-translated his literary work, most of it can be considered as metaphorical self-translations. *El color del verano* is the last novel that Arenas finished before his death in 1990 and it is also the fourth novel of his *Pentagonía* [Pentagony]. It tells the story of an island and its inhabitants in 1999. The island's dictator, Fifo, has decided to organize a grand carnival to celebrate his fifty years of power.⁴ This party consists of numerous events recounted by the narrator throughout the novel. The island's inhabitants cannot bear living under Fifo's regime anymore, mainly because the concept of 'pleasure' has entirely disappeared. As fleeing the island is impossible, they decide to oppose the dictator in two ways: with an excessive sexual fury, and by gnawing the island from underneath in order to free it from its platform and find at last the longed for freedom. Despite the organized repression of the

‘gnawers’ by the state, at the end of the carnival, the island comes loose. Unfortunately, as the inhabitants cannot seem to agree on its new destination/destiny, it ends up sinking into the sea.

The three previous novels of Arenas’ *Pentagonía* can without any doubt be considered autobiographical novels, and the author’s life as a child, adolescent and young adult depicted in each of them is easily recognizable. However, Arenas opted to give invented names to his characters, probably in order to protect himself from the Cuban authorities behind the thinly veiled form of fiction. Yet *El color del verano* is his first and only work of fiction that shows nominal identity between author and protagonist.

In her article about translating Cuban testimonial literature, Pedro Ricoy highlights the difference that needs to be made between literature written on the island, and literature written by the diaspora outside the island (2012: 576). This novel is of particular interest because although the whole novel had to be rewritten in exile due to the loss of the original manuscripts, a few chapters were written in Cuba before Arenas’ departure in the Mariel boatlift in 1980. The censorship and persecution he was suffering from while still living on the island had already helped to configure the direction the novel was going to take, but the new situation in which he found himself, in exile and dying of AIDS, was likely the driving force behind his decision to give his own name to the main character in this novel.

Perceiving *El color del verano* as autofiction allows the reader to understand that it is based on the testimony of a real witness, which makes the message conveyed by the author stronger. In the following sections, the different characteristics of autofiction appearing in *El color del verano* will be analysed in order to illustrate why it ought to be added to the inventory of the Latin American autofictions;⁵ this analysis will then serve as an introduction to the discussion about the relevance of studying autofiction from an interdisciplinary point of view.

Is El color del verano autofiction? Nominal identity: not just the author

As previously explained, one of the main characteristics of autofiction is the use of the nominal identity between author and protagonist/narrator. In this novel, not only does Reinaldo Arenas use the nominal identity – twice in the book he actually uses his full name, Reinaldo Arenas – but he also uses real names for his fictional characters.⁶

The protagonist is a writer and homosexual native from Holguín, who feels persecuted under Fife's regime. This persecution, which can be considered as an extraneous reason for his writing, prompts him to lead multiple lives, each with different personalities and names, which he uses depending on the circumstances in which he finds himself. This fragmented identity is reminiscent of the self-translator and self-translated subject. The character *Reinaldo Arenas* is the writer. As the author, he comes from the countryside which he has decided to leave in order to start a new life with more opportunities in Havana. He represents the intellectual side of the character and he is the one who writes the novel within the novel. *Gabriel Fuentes* is the countryman (*el guajiro*) who comes from Holguin, son of Oneida, the name of Arenas' mother in real life. He represents the 'official' side of the main character, as he demonstrates the qualities inherent in a revolutionary man and tries to conform to the image of an exemplary son, close to the one his mother always hoped to have. Finally *la Tétrica Mofeta* is the irreverent side of the protagonist. He is the homosexual, and therefore represents the clandestine facet of the main character's identity.

The narration switches constantly between the three main homodiegetic narrators: *Reinaldo Arenas*, *Gabriel Fuentes* and *la Tétrica Mofeta* (this last character being the one that most often takes the narrative voice) and in several instances in the novel, the reader comes to

understand that these three characters represent three different identities of one individual. This is made evident in the following example, when the paperwork for the purchase of the protagonist's apartment is signed for: 'el señor Rubén Valentín Díaz Marzo recibe la cantidad de dos mil pesos líquidos a cambio de entregarle con carácter permanente uno de sus cuartos a Gabriel Fuentes, alias Reinaldo Arenas, alias la Tétrica Mofeta' (1999: 310) ['in return for the permanent transfer of one of his rooms in the Hotel Monserrate to Sr. Gabriel Fuentes, a.k.a. Reinaldo Arenas, a.k.a. Skunk in a Funk, Sr. Rubén Valentín Díaz Marzo receives the amount of two thousand pesos in liquid assets'] (2000: 270).

In fact, the three names offer a nominal identity with the author since in real life *Gabriel*⁷ is his middle name and *Fuentes* his father's last name, while *la Tétrica Mofeta* was the name Arenas was using in Havana's homosexual underworld in the 1970s. While doing this, Arenas is applying a technique very typical of autofiction: not only does he write about his own life but also about lives he could have lived. When using autofiction, the writer is not insinuating that he is the person hidden behind his character. On the contrary, he willingly gives his own name to his main character, while creating an utterly unrealistic world, in which it is obvious that these events never actually happened to him, even if they could have happened or might still happen in the future. One of the specificities of autofiction is exactly this contradictory and confusing message from the author to his reader. The author is not interested in the faithfulness of the facts exposed in his work but rather in its literary quality as well as in the message he is conveying to his reader through the use of this specific genre. This recalls the authorial liberty of the self-translator who often opts to improve/amend the original text in order to respond more accurately to the intrinsic and extraneous motives that led him to self-translate in the first place.

‘Substitut Livresque’

A second characteristic of autofiction, which reinforces the theory of autofiction as a metaphorical self-translation and is directly linked to the nominal identity but not always used simultaneously, is the use of what Colonna has called the ‘substitut livresque’ [‘bookish substitute’] (1989: 57). This refers to the writer presenting his character(s) as the author(s) of his own novels, increasing in this way the reader’s confusion, as well as the identity between author and main character. In the following example, Arenas describes his character *la Tétrica Mofeta* writing the chapter of *El color del verano* that the reader has just started to read, entitled ‘Del bugarrón’ [‘HM, top, seeking same’]: ‘El viejo bugarrón se marchó cerrando despacio la puerta. En uno de los recovecos del Parque Central de La Habana vio a la Tétrica Mofeta, reescribiendo una vez más su novela perdida, *El color del verano*. Trabajaba ahora en un capítulo titulado “Del bugarrón”’ (1999: 80) [‘The old bull macho sighed and turned and left, closing the door quietly behind him. In one of the out-of-the-way corners of Parque Central he saw Skunk in a Funk; he was rewriting his lost novel *The Color of Summer* yet again. He was working on a chapter titled “HM, top, seeking same”’] (2000: 59, italics in original).

This metafictional trait appears also in another excerpt where the reader discovers how the character Reinaldo is reworking a paragraph that the reader has only just read. This is a very interesting excerpt because he plays at the same time with the protagonist’s (and author’s) fragmented identity:

Sentado en un banco de la terminal de trenes, Reinaldo volvió a releer el párrafo que acababa de escribir y con el que comenzaba otro capítulo de su novela. Enseguida agregó: ‘En realidad la madre no barría la basura, sino todo su pasado y su presente.

[...]’ Gabriel dejó de escribir y pensó que aquella escritura tampoco iba a remediar el sufrimiento de su madre. Por el contrario, de leer aquel manuscrito se pondría aún más triste. (1999: 122)

[Sitting on a bench in the train terminal, Reinaldo reread the paragraph he’d just written, the first paragraph of a new chapter in his novel. Immediately, he added *The truth was, the mother wasn’t sweeping up dirt and leaves and scraps of paper, she was sweeping up her entire past and present.* [...] Gabriel stopped writing; it struck him that this writing of his was not going to help his mother’s suffering, either. Quite the contrary – if she read this manuscript, it would make her even sadder.] (2000: 99)

The use of the author’s name(s) as well as the explicit strategy of crediting his books to his fictional character(s), contributes to our understanding that the writer decides to translate his own life experiences into his autofiction.

Historical and political context: personal identity

Nevertheless, in this novel, in addition to the use of nominal identity and its linked ‘bookish substitute’, Arenas also overtly exploits the personal identity with his narrator/protagonist. As well as bearing Arenas’ name(s), the main character also finds himself in the same situation as the author: a persecuted Cuban homosexual writer from the countryside who now resides in exile and is dying from AIDS.

The 1960s were quite significant in terms of the direction that the Cuban Revolution was taking. Many changes were established and some of them had serious consequences for two

specific groups of the Cuban population: the intellectuals, and more specifically those who questioned the new government's policies (Castro⁸ 1972), and the homosexuals,⁹ who did not comply with the image of Che Guevara's *hombre nuevo*, and therefore were considered as ill patients who had to be rehabilitated in order to be 'restored' in Cuban society as 'real men' (Álvarez 2003; Bejel 2001). The UMAPs, labour camps created partly for homosexuals in 1965, and their adaption of the Nazi statement 'Arbeit macht Frei' ['Work will make you free'] to 'El trabajo os hará hombres' ['Work will make men out of you'], are a clear example of this.

Although this novel is a work of fiction, the historical context of Fidel Castro's Revolution from the point of view of an exiled writer and homosexual is easily recognizable. It is the story of 'una isla dominada por un tirano absoluto llamado Fifo' (1999: 136) ['an island ruled over by an absolute tyrant named Fifo'] (2000: 112) who in 1999 had been in power for forty years. People were living under strong control from the state and had no freedom to either leave the island or 'hacer el más leve comentario contra el tirano' (1999: 136) ['make even the slightest remark against the tyrant'] (2000: 112). Instead, they were expected to praise the 'libertad maravillosa y al porvenir luminoso que les había concedido el tirano' (1999: 136) ['marvellous freedom and shining future that the tyrant had given them'] (2000: 112). The author/narrator also refers to the need for the island's inhabitants' multiple identities, the repression of critical voices, and the hope for escape as the only solution to their circumstances:

En aquella isla todo el mundo vivía por lo menos una doble vida: públicamente no dejaban ni un instante de alabar al tirano, secretamente lo aborrecían y ansiaban desesperadamente que reventase. Pero el tirano tenía un inmenso ejército y un sistema de espionaje único, de manera que destruirlo parecía imposible. El sueño de toda aquella

gente ya no era que la isla fuera libre, sino poder escaparse de aquella isla que era una prisión perfecta. (1999: 136)

[On the island of this story, all the inhabitants lived at least a double life: publicly there was not a moment they did not praise and laud the tyrant, while secretly they loathed him and prayed in desperation for him to die – preferably a horrible death. But the tyrant had an enormous army and a wonderful intelligence machine, so that destroying him was virtually impossible. The dream of the entire population of the island was no longer to be free, but rather that someday they be able to escape from the island, which was a perfect prison.] (2000: 112)

Throughout the novel, the informed reader can appreciate the similarity with the political context of the Cuban Revolution, as well as Reinaldo Arenas' own situation within this context. Scattered throughout the book, with no apparent logical order, are four letters which present an inner dialogue between the author's divided selves. The main concerns expressed by the characters in these epistolary exchanges are clearly those of the writer himself: the disease of AIDS and the suffering caused by exile and nostalgia.

The third letter, for example, is written by *Reinaldo in Miami* to *Reinaldo on the island*, which could be interpreted as a letter from the writer himself to his character, who represents himself in a life where he would have decided not to leave and to suffer the consequences. The character *Reinaldo in Miami* mentions his inability to find happiness in exile and comes to regard life on the island under Fifo's regime as better than his own, which evokes the following reaction of *Reinaldo on the island* in the last letter:

Me imagino cuánto han sufrido y estarán sufriendo, y la soledad que padecerán allá, lejos de este país que es el nuestro y que lo seguirá siendo vivamos donde vivamos. Pero nada de eso es comparable al horror de estar aquí. Allá, aunque sólo reciban patadas por el culo, pueden al menos gritar; aquí tenemos que aplaudir esos golpes, y con entusiasmo. ¿Cómo se atreven a decirme ustedes que no me vaya de aquí? (1999: 357)

[I assure you that I can imagine how much you've all suffered – and will go on suffering – and how lonely you must be up there, far from this country that is and always will be ours, no matter where we live. But get real. Nothing that you suffer can compare with the horror of life down here. Up there, even if all you get is kicks in the ass, at least you can yell about it – here, we have to applaud when we get kicked, and applaud enthusiastically. How can the three of you have the nerve to tell me I should stay here?] (2000: 314)

The idea of having the ability to cry out is recurrent in Arenas' fictional and non-fictional work. Although exile was painful for him, he considered that the freedom of speech he had acquired by leaving his country was what made those sufferings worth enduring. He refers to this in the Foreword to this novel, which appears in the middle of the book, again to confuse the reader about the personal identity of the writer and his characters: 'En este país, como en todos los que he visitado o he residido, he conocido la humillación, la miseria y la hipocresía, pero también he tenido el privilegio de poder gritar. Tal vez ese grito no caiga en el vacío' (1999:

260) [‘In this country, as in every country that I have ever visited or lived in, I have known humiliation, poverty, and hypocrisy, but there I have also had the privilege to cry out. Perhaps that cry will not meet oblivion’] (2000: 226).

This reference to the freedom of speech recalls the intrinsic and extraneous reasons of self-translators such as André Brink who opt for this type of writing in order to avoid censorship, and to convey a political message reaching a wider audience. We will come back to this in the discussion that follows.

Literary art work

The second key characteristic for a novel to be considered an autofiction, according to Lecarme, is that it needs to be a work of fiction. In literary genres such as autofiction or autobiographical novels, the writer will often make sure to inform the reader that she or he does not recommend a referential reading through a preface, note or prologue, among other possibilities (García 2009: 158; Molero de la Iglesia 2000: 535–36, 543). This is exactly what Arenas does at the start of his book, when he adds a note to the supposed Judge (also considered homosexual by the author):

Al juez

¡Un momento, querida! Antes de internarte en estas páginas con el fin de meterme en la cárcel, no olvides que estás leyendo una obra de ficción y que por lo mismo sus personajes son infundios o juegos de la imaginación (figuras literarias, parodias y metáforas) y no personas de la vida real. No olvides además que la novela se desarrolla en 1999. Sería injusto encausarme por un hecho ficticio que cuando se narró ni siquiera había sucedido.

[To the Judge

Whoa, girl, just hold it right there. Before you start going through these pages looking for things to have me thrown in jail for, I want you to try to remember that you're reading a work of fiction here, so the characters in it are made up – they're concoctions, denizens of the world of imagination (literary figures, parodies, metaphors – you know), not real-life people. And another thing, my dear, while we're at it – I wrote this novel in 1990 and set it in 1999. I mean think about it – how fair would it be to haul me into court for a bunch of fictitious stuff that when it was written down hadn't even happened yet?

The Author] (2000: vii)

El color del verano fits impeccably into the category of 'fantastic autofictions' (Colonna 2004: 75), where the surreal events presented move the reader even further away from a possible referential reading. Arenas offers a piece of work that belongs to what Federman has called 'laughtertexture' (in Louwagie 2013: 124), which implies that the literary project becomes a burlesque game in which the author is playing with the reader. This linguistic and literary game has a clear critical, social, and even political purpose.

As with many self-translations, the author makes full use of his freedom to adapt the original 'text', in this case his own life memories, into a literary text, his novel. There is no doubt about the fact that the narrator and protagonist are the author himself, but the story is entirely fictional as the author is not concerned with the verisimilitude of what is being told. The author's life experiences have been translated into a hyperbolic, exaggerated and provocative literary text.

A few examples are the homosexuality of all the characters (including the dictator Fifo, and the reader him/herself), the resuscitation of all sorts of people from Cuban culture for the occasion of the dictator's carnival, the gnawing of the island from its platform, and the narration of events that take place in the future, among others.

Another key fictional characteristic of this work is the complex organization of the novel which reminds one of Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* [Hopscotch]. The book is introduced by a one-act play about the escape of the nineteenth-century Cuban poet Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda to Key West. After the play, the novel proceeds as a sequence of chapters that all refer to a part of Fifo's carnival, not always related in a chronological way, as the reader finds out on several occasions. Chapters are interrupted by tongue twisters, letters and sequences called 'La historia' ['The story'] referring to Cuba's history. Finally, the disorder of the book sequences is made obvious when the writer decides to include his Foreword in the middle of the book.

Arenas is expecting an active reader (Iser 1980: 27–38; García 2009: 150) for this novel, one that will try to find logic in the confusing and contradictory work with which she or he has engaged; one that will attempt to give a meaning to this fictional self-translation of the author's life and understand the message of complaint and criticism embedded in the fiction. The writer's objective is very similar to that found in the children's game of hide-and-seek: the writer finds pleasure in being hidden but at the same time she or he wants to be recognized by the reader and in this way convey his/her message. The child psychologist Donald Winnicott argues in his book *Playing and Reality* that to be found is a pleasure, but not to be found is a catastrophe (in García 2009: 159). What the author of an autofictive self-translation wants is to be recognized in his work of fiction, as well as to be able to hide behind it if necessary. He enjoys playing with the reader; however, the clues given are so evident that not to be recognized would indeed be a

catastrophe, as it would not serve the intrinsic and extraneous reasons of self-translation, and indirectly autofiction, such as to convey his/her message to a wider audience, to avoid censorship, and in this case to denounce the injustices that took place under the Cuban revolutionary regime.

Arenas has on several occasions maintained that it is important to read his novel as a work of fiction, despite the similarity with historic context and real persons. He expressed on several occasions his interest in reflecting the different realities we live in (Montenegro and Olivares 1980), which vary according to everyone's interpretation of 'external reality'. In his point of view, fiction is an ideal way of representing these. In a letter to his friends Jorge and Margarita Camacho, he explains that it is imperative to understand that a referential reading of this novel would be entirely inappropriate:

Es importante que la gente entienda que están leyendo una novela y no un libro de historia, que se trata de una novela irónica y sarcástica con sentido del humor negro. [...] Los mismos homosexuales en mi novela no aparecen idealizados ni los cubanos, ni yo mismo. Y por dios, esto es una obra de ficción. (Arenas Collection, Box 23, Folder 24)

[It is important that people understand they are reading a novel and not a history book, an ironic and sarcastic novel with black humor. [...] In my novel, the gays themselves are not idealized, nor the Cubans, nor myself. And for God's sake, this is a work of fiction.]

However, despite Arenas' recommendation, it is clear that his ultimate goal is to be found, and therefore for the reader to understand that he is taking advantage of the possibilities

of autofiction to bear witness to real events. The testimonial message is very clear in his *Pentagonía* as a whole, when alluding to the Cuban Revolution, and in *El color del verano* specifically, when referring to the 1970s and to his own sufferings as a homosexual writer on the island and later in exile. In the Foreword of this novel, he clarifies that, although this is a work of fiction, it is ‘deeply rooted in one of the most vital periods of [his] life’:

Predomina aquí [en esta novela] la visión subterránea de un mundo homosexual que seguramente nunca aparecerá en ningún periódico del mundo y mucho menos de Cuba. Esta novela está intrínsecamente arraigada a una de las épocas más vitales de mi vida y de la mayoría de los que fuimos jóvenes durante las décadas del sesenta y del setenta. *El color del verano* es un mundo que, si no lo escribo, se perderá fragmentado en la memoria de los que lo conocieron. (1999: 262)

[This novel presents a vision of an underground homosexual world that will surely never appear in any newspaper or journal in the world, much less in Cuba. It is deeply rooted in one of the most vital periods of my life and the life of most of us who were young during the sixties and seventies. *The Color of Summer* is a world which, if I do not put it down on paper, will be lost, fragmented and dispersed as it is in the memories of those who knew it.] (2000: 228)

Using fiction, imagination and a lot of humour, Arenas self-translates his personal experiences in order to condemn Fidel Castro’s regime and the oppression he (Arenas) has suffered as an intellectual and homosexual in Cuba. Autofiction allows Arenas to ‘take revenge’

against the Cuban regime without being held accountable for it. He does not need to ask for permission to tell his story and to use real names in his novel as the story is not real. It has not even occurred yet. This is probably why he considered autofiction as the most appropriate literary genre to self-translate his life experiences into his last literary text.

Discussion

To begin this discussion it is necessary to go back to Fitch's interpretation of a self-translated text. Although referring to the process of self-translation as 'the translation of a text from one language to another by the author himself', his conclusions can easily be applied to metaphorical self-translation and, accordingly, to the autofictive text. Fitch presents the source text and the self-translated text as two 'independent' texts in 'interdependence' (in Hokenson and Munson 2007: 194): 'The second text does not interpret the first so much as it "completes" or finishes it'. Therefore, for Fitch, the texts are 'variants of something that has no tangible textual existence' (ibid.). It could be argued that this 'something' is the author's understanding of the fictive story or/and the memory of his personal existence, interpreted from the present of the translation process.

The translator of this 'something', and in the case of literature, the writer, can then decide to translate it into an autobiography, whereby there is an attempt to follow the referential pact – or what in Translation Studies would be referred to as a literal translation. On the other hand, the self-translating author can also opt to enrich this referential translation with literary features such as character development, surreal plot, non-chronological organization of the novel, no obligation to cover the events of the author's whole life, among others. What matters is that the main thread of the story, which in Fitch's words would be this 'intangible something', remains

the same. In fact, an author could write infinite fictional metaphorical self-translations based on this something that only exists in the author's mind, which then can appear in different formats, such as an autobiographical novel, an autodocumentary novel (*novela auto-testimonial*; Panichelli-Batalla 2008) and an autofiction, as long as the creative aspect of the literary work is original in each of them. It can either focus on different periods of the author's life, or on different aspects of his/her personal experiences, using a wide range of literary techniques not available to the writer of an autobiography due to the rigidity of the genre.

In terms of the interdependence of the source text and the self-translated text, Fitch explains that once both texts exist, 'the first is incomplete without [its self-translation]' (in Montini 2010: 307). By reading both, the audience will gain access to the 'interliminal' space existing between both texts (Gaddis Rose, in Wilson 2009: 196). In the case of literature and more specifically life-writing literature, however, the situation is slightly different. As the 'source text' has no textual existence, no one but the author will have access to it. Nevertheless, once the author creates several metaphorical self-translations of it, those should not be separated as they will indeed complement each other and help the reader to gain a better understanding of the author's life, memories and experiences and enable him/her to discover this interliminal space of the author's memories. In Arenas' case, it becomes necessary to read his work as a whole in order to understand the political and ideological message he wants to convey to his readers. By way of illustration, his autobiography *Antes que anochezca* (1992) [Before Night Falls] is almost a prerequisite for the non-informed reader to understand his novel *El color del verano* and the latest offers a complementary version of the part of the autobiography that refers to Arenas' life in Cuba in the 1960s and 1970s as well as his experience as an exile in the United States. Both texts are interdependent and should be read in conjunction.

Another recurrent element of self-translation in several autofictions is the original idea behind the creation of such a text. Intrinsic and extraneous reasons such as those mentioned by Antunes apply in many cases to writers of autofictions, and Reinaldo Arenas with his novel *El color del verano* is probably one of the best examples. As Wilson states, ‘Self-translation can be seen as a manifestation of the essential human desire for recognition; a vital urge to be heard and understood’ (2009: 191). For this reason it has also been considered in some instances as an act of protest, as in the case of the Italian-Canadian playwright Marco Micone (Puccini 2013: 133), or the South-African writer André Brink (Kruger, in Antunes 2013: 47).

Autofiction, although often not used for that purpose, is an ideal literary genre for an author who wants to avoid censorship of, or the legal consequences from, his writing. Alberca calls the use of fiction the author’s ‘protective shield’ (Alberca 2007: 261) since the argument of being ‘just fiction’ offers him/her a useful defence against any accusations made regarding his/her book. With *El color del verano* Arenas wanted to make sure that a testimonial message was left behind. André Gide said that fiction is sometimes better for getting closer to the truth than memoir or autobiography (in Lejeune 1989: 26), as it gives greater liberty to the writer to convey his message; this is the liberty that self-translators enjoy when translating their own work into another language that they speak fluently. To these intrinsic reasons of protest and fight for freedom of speech, one should add in Arenas’ case the extraneous motive of the urgency of writing due to illness and imminent death. *El color del verano* is the last novel that Arenas finished in the hospital, shortly before his death. As can be seen from the manuscripts, some parts are barely readable because most of it was written with needles in his hands (Figure 1).

<Insert Figure 1>

One might wonder whether, had there been no persecution and such urgency to write, Arenas would ever have written such a powerful novel as *El color del verano*, a literary work that he considered his best¹⁰ (Arenas Collection). Both self-translation and autofiction give the author the opportunity to convey a political and/or ideological statement in a way that might reach a wider audience, and avoid censorship.

It is now pertinent to address the motives for self-translated autofiction. In addition to the fact that most of the characteristics of self-translation can be applied to the autofictional genre, there is one that is of particular interest: the fragmented identity of the self-translator. Julian Green once said about his experience of self-translation, ‘En anglais, j’étais devenu quelqu’un d’autre’ [‘in English, I had become someone else’] (in Lagarde 2013: 11). Self-translators have often been raised in a bilingual context, for personal or political reasons, and therefore demonstrate a fragmented identity, depending on the language and the context in which they interact (Lagarde 2013: 11). Autofiction also often presents this fragmented identity, where the author-protagonist is faced with his/her double(s) which represent another aspect of his/her identity, often directly linked with what caused the writer to opt for the writing of an autofiction.

The multiple representations of the author via his created characters lead us to wonder whether autofiction could be a way of reproducing multiple identities. In the case of Arenas’ *El color del verano*, the answer is quite obvious. As he explains in his book, while living under a regime that oppressed intellectuals and homosexuals, Reinaldo Arenas had to live multiple lives. This multiple identity of the author can be found in most of Arenas’ novels but the use of autofiction in the fourth novel of his *Pentagonía* made it possible for him to describe it to the

reader in a much more direct way, as well as to inform the reader about the difficulties linked to such a life.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the analysis provided earlier, *El color del verano* is arguably Arenas' most autofictitious novel, not only because of the nominal and personal identity between author, narrator and protagonist, but also because of the use of the 'substitut livresque', the appearance of numerous characters inspired by real persons from Cuban culture and many other literary techniques that thoroughly combine fiction and autobiographical information. Considering it as an example of this literary genre strengthens the testimony presented by the author, a real witness, through the use of fiction.

The present study has offered an interdisciplinary perspective to the study of autofiction. Not only does this literary genre have a lot in common with the practice of self-translation, but it also offers the possibility of starting a new dialogue about why an author of autofiction decides to use this specific literary genre, what the relation is between an author's autofiction and the rest of his work, and what information it gives readers about the 'interliminal space' between the original and self-translated text, which in this case could be considered as this 'something of no tangible textual existence' that only exists in the author's mind: the memories of his life experiences.

Analysing autofiction from a self-translation perspective offers a deeper understanding of this novel in particular and of autofiction in general. Not all autofictions can be considered as an act of protest through which the author intends to convey a political and/or ideological statement, but some do, as is the case of Reinaldo Arenas' *El color del verano*. Linking this type of writing

with self-translations such as those of André Brink enriches the reader's experience as it highlights the urge to share a life experience with a wider audience as well as the possibility of avoiding, through the protective shield of fiction, oppressive consequences to the author's creation.

This new perspective also raises a new question regarding the fragmented identities of both the writer of autofiction and the self-translator: could the intrinsic motive of expressing the need to open up about this multiple identity be added to those that lead a writer to opt for this specific genre? In Arenas' case, the motive was already present in his previous novels of the *Pentagonía* but never in such an explicit way. By self-translating himself into his autofiction, *El color del verano*, Reinaldo Arenas has made sure that he would be found by his reader, and that in this way he would manage to convey his message of revenge and complaint towards the Cuban political regime to a wider audience.

This study is not exhaustive and its purpose is to initiate a dialogue about a link not yet established between Translation and Literary Studies. This analysis has attempted to demonstrate how the theory of self-translation can bring a deeper understanding to the literary genre of autofiction. Nonetheless, it might also be worth considering what autofiction can bring to self-translation. Indeed, self-translators such as Jorge Semprún who have written autofictions can provide interesting avenues for further research. As Ouyang Yu states, 'If authors ever want to give birth to the self, self-translation is a way to do so, provided they are equipped with at least two languages – and two hopes' (2012: 74). In Arenas' case, these two languages were his internal language of memories as a Cuban exile and his textual literary discourse. As for hopes, he had many more than two.

Notes

¹ Translation Studies scholars such as Tassiopoulos (2011) and López López-Gay (2008) mention autofiction and self-translation together but only due to the fact that autofictions were translated by the authors themselves into another language. Neither of them establishes a link between the two from a metaphorical point of view.

² Life writing appears in different literary forms, such as autobiography, autobiographical novels, autodocumentary novels and autofiction. The difference between the autobiography and the three other genres is that the first one is not a work of fiction. The autobiographical novel reflects the author's life in a fictionalized way. The autodocumentary novel is very similar but it adds to the latter the trait of testimony: it offers a voice to a witness (in this case the author) who condemns a situation of oppression s/he has suffered. Finally, autofiction is different in the sense that it is an autobiographical novel in which the author has decided to give his/her own name to the main character/narrator.

³ Meylaerts summarizes the idea of Bourdieu's initial habitus as 'the individual's mental and physical structures as shaped in early socialization within structures of family, class, and education' (2011: 136).

⁴ It has to be noted that the Cuban Revolution triumphed in January 1959 but as the narrator explains, the dictator Fido opted for adding ten extra years because of his love of round numbers and publicity (1999: 78).

⁵ Manuel Alberca classifies two of the five novels of the *Pentagonía*, *Celestino antes del alba* (2000) [*Singing from the Well*] and *Otra vez el mar* (2002) [*Farewell to the Sea*] as autofictions (2007: 302). However, we believe that a closer look at each of these two novels would consider

them rather as autobiographical novels, mainly because of the lack of nominal identity with the author.

⁶ For the carnival, Fifo resuscitated several key persons of the (mainly) Cuban culture, such as José Lezama Lima, Virgilio Piñera and José Martí. Their names remain unchanged. Names of persons of Arenas' time have been adapted but are very easily recognizable, such as, Heberto Puntilla (Heberto Padilla) or Halisia Jalonzo (Alicia Alonso). At the end of the book, Arenas offers a glossary of the real names (with short biography) of those who have died and appear in the novel.

⁷ Information obtained through interviews with Dolores Koch and René Cifuentes, close friends of the author, February 2006.

⁸ In his 'Palabras a los intelectuales' (1961) ['Words to the Intellectuals'], Castro made the following statement: 'Dentro de la Revolución: todo; Contra la Revolución ningún derecho' (1972: 363) ['Within the Revolution: everything; against the Revolution no rights at all']. This clarified his expectations of the Cuban intellectuals: unconditional support for the Revolution.

⁹ It is worth mentioning that when referring to homosexuals and their persecution, we only include homosexual men, not lesbians, as they are the group whose persecution was denounced by Reinaldo Arenas.

¹⁰ Arenas expresses the fact that he considers this novel as his best literary work in two letters written respectively to his friends Margarita and Jorge Camacho on 24 May 1990 and to the German academic Ottmar Ette on 31 May 1990. Both can be found in the Arenas Collection, Box 23, Folder 4.

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