
‘I am you and you are me’: Translators and Writers in Recent Works of Fiction

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Abstract

As translators strive, still, to achieve recognition and emerge from the shadows, translation continues to bubble up to the surface as a theme or stylistic device in literature. This tendency, dubbed "transfiction," is illustrated by the recent novels of New York authors Rachel Cantor and Idra Novey, whose multidimensional stories cross borders, languages, genres and continents. Their protagonists are translators who struggle with issues of self-doubt and untranslatability, yet manage to overcome their uncertainty and invisibility by taking control of the narrative and writing the story of their translations. In Cantor's *Good on Paper* and Novey's *Ways to Disappear*, both published in 2016, the lives of translators and authors are intertwined. Shira Greene, Cantor's heroine, has been chosen by Italian Nobel laureate Romei to translate his novel because he has read a translation of hers as well as her story about Paul Celan. As she works her way through his manuscript, Shira realizes that the plot resembles events in her own life. In an intriguing twist, both content and structure of the original are inspired by the translator's work. Novey blurs the lines between life and fiction and stages translation as central to modern life. Emma Neufeld, an American translator, goes to Brazil when her author, a famous woman writer, disappears mysteriously. In a meditation on relations between the translator and her author, between translating and writing – relations that are depicted in terms of adultery and betrayal – Novey's translator evokes the splendour of translation while at the same time seeking self-expression through her own writing.

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