

# **Pseudotranslation as an Expression of Creative Freedom – Writing and Authorship in Itō Seikō’s *The Novel That Does Not Exist***

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## **Abstract**

This article aims to explore the possible functions of pseudotranslation in Japanese literature based on the short story called *Atashi* from Itō Seikō’s *Sonzai shinai shōsetsu* (*The Novel That Does Not Exist*, 2013). Even though the notion of pseudotranslation has been thoroughly researched in the context of European literature, it still remains relatively unexplored within Japanese literature. While in some cases it allows the writers to hide their true identity for different reasons, I argue that in *The Novel That Does Not Exist* it is primarily employed as a way to reinterpret Roland Barthes’ concept of the death of the author. Although the stories within the novel are unrelated on the plot level, they are connected by the common premise that they pretend to be translations of “non-existent” authors from all around the world. Using the concept of pseudo (or fictitious) translation and Barthes’ idea of the death of the author, I will examine how the intertextuality of the story allows to see it as an allegory that is not necessarily bound to a specific cultural context but can be expanded on further. In the beginning of the article, the main theoretical framework as well as the connection between pseudotranslation and the death of the author will be introduced. In the second part I will move on to the case study and divide it into two sections. The first one will be focused on analyzing the way the story connects to the idea of the author being “dead”. To do so, the role of writing and authorship both in and outside *Atashi* as well as the editor’s note that follows the story will be examined. Based on this, I will then proceed to the second section and show how intertextuality of the text is emphasized through the decision to choose pseudotranslation as a form. After that, some final remarks on reinterpretation of the death of the author within the story will be made.

**Keywords:** Itō Seikō, pseudotranslation, death of the author, intertextuality.

## **1. Introduction**

Translation can never exist without the original. Or can it? From the first glance, this question may seem counterintuitive. After all, in different languages the word “translation” itself is closely tied to the association with transferring an object from one place to another which would make little sense without a certain starting point. From English translation to Ukrainian *pereklad*, the origin of the word can often be traced back to the action of either carrying or bringing something. While not being a one-size-fits-all rule (as some exceptions such as Japanese *hon’yaku* show), this would naturally mean that both point A (a source language) and point B (a target one) would be needed. But is it really always so

straightforward?

In 2013, Itō Seikō published a book called *Sonzai shinai shōsetsu* (*The Novel That Does Not Exist*). It consists of six short stories taking place in six different parts of the world – Philadelphia, Tokyo, Peru, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, and Croatia - followed by comments from an unnamed editor (or even editors?). Each one was presumably written by a foreign author and then translated into Japanese. However, the premise is broken right from the beginning – the reader immediately learns that none of them is real and that the novel itself does not exist. How can we classify its relation to the original if there’s no original? Can it even be called a “translation”? There are several different interdisciplinary approaches that can handle this problem – from the task of translator proposed by Walter Benjamin to debates on untranslatability in Literary Studies. Moreover, some other important points to work upon would include: connecting the text to theoretical base of Translation Studies (especially through the lenses of the task of translator proposed by Walter Benjamin in his eponymous essay), discussing the writer-reader-translator relationships within the debates on impossibility of translation in Literary Studies and paying closer attention to the structure of the novel as a complex interconnected whole. However, addressing all of these issues will remain outside of scope of the present analysis due to the page limit.

Instead, I will concentrate on two topics – authorship and intertextuality specifically - and argue that it is possible to place the text into the framework of *pseudotranslation*. By blurring the notion of nationality and authorship, Itō Seikō turns the book into a philosophical conversation one doesn’t need to just passively follow – in fact, it’s more than welcome to have a say. In this article I will be analyzing *Atashi*, the third story in the collection, to show how pseudotranslation helps to shift the boundaries of one specific (Japanese) cultural context and extend them. Unlike the previous stories, it, for the first time, explicitly emphasizes the absence of translator within *The Novel That Does Not Exist* which allows to look at it as a transition from translation to pseudotranslation. For this reason, analyzing it as such will help to map out the base to talk about the novel at large further on. While looking into all stories would remain out of scope of the paper, *Atashi* can serve as a starting point - and illustrate some of the remarks that would be crucial for the whole work, as well.

I will first try to look at it through the lenses of intertextuality and – especially – the idea that the author within it is “dead”. I will focus on the author-reader interaction that goes beyond the boundaries of just one story and continues in the subsequent editor’s note. To do so, I will choose writing as a topic that is first referred to within *Atashi* and then extended further outside of it. After that, the possibility to read the text as pseudotranslation and implications of this interpretation will be discussed. Finally, I will conclude with a brief discussion on how pseudotranslations challenge the concept of authorship in the context of contemporary Japanese literature. However, in order to start the conversation, it would be useful to go back to the question posed before – can translation exist without the original?

### 1.1 Pseudotranslation as a Concept

Pseudotranslation proposes a new way to look at the problem. Challenging the definition of what translation is, it crosses the borders of both translation studies and literary theory. As will be seen from the discussion to follow, the concept itself is broad enough to include vastly different categories of texts,

from falsifications to deliberate attempts to question the existing binary relationships between translation and original. While it's difficult to neatly unify all of the works that might be described as pseudo (or fictitious) translations, the common trait which would allow us to group them together is, in my opinion, the concept of power. First of all, in some cases choosing pseudotranslation as a form can help to make the hierarchy between the source and target languages more visible. Translation per se may be truthful to the original text, replace it, censor it, turn into an adaptation along the way, alter a certain passage or help to rediscover it in another language. But this bond is always more than just the direct interaction between two texts. It becomes especially easy to notice if we look at it through the lenses of the possible cultural meanings translation carries.

To illustrate this, Gideon Toury in his comprehensive introduction titled *Descriptive Translation Studies – and beyond* (1995) offers an example of pseudotranslation serving as a tool that challenges the dominant literary canon established in a given country (Toury 1995; 55). Briefly referring to *Papa Hamlet* (1889), a novel presumably written in Norwegian and then translated into German, Toury contemplates on the reasons why declaring it as a “translation” was needed. Too unusual and experimental for German literary scene at the time, it could still be accepted on the premise of being originally “foreign”. He shows how, never an official part of a canon, translated texts might have enjoyed more freedom in terms of possible criticism since they wouldn't be evaluated on the same scale domestic works were (Toury 1995; 55). It is possible to see how that would have two potential benefits – for the writer it could be a chance to experiment with the style and go outside the borders without the fear of appearing too radical. Meanwhile, for the readers and researchers the book could be placed into the already existing and flourishing category of translated Scandinavian literature. It is also hard to deny the fact that, in order to write it, a certain amount of exposure to Norwegian novels would be needed, as well, which allows to see the fictitious translation as a result of intercultural interaction.

Emily Apter in *The Translation Zone* (2006) devotes a chapter to pseudotranslation specifically linking it to the task of translator and question of originality. Reverting the binary relationships between (supposedly existing) original and translation she calls the later a “clone” of the former. The reader, according to her, is “urged to accept the clone of a code as a replacement for the original, or to give up conventional, essentialist notions of what the original “is”” (Apter 2006). While this observation would be especially relevant in the case of texts that claim to be translations of long-lost texts, it is also highly applicable to *The Novel That Does Not Exist*. Having no choice but to engage into the “game” Itō Seikō proposes to play, the readers can trace how the narrative slowly transforms from real translation to the realm of *pseudotranslation*.

In recent research the concept has been expanded in vastly different directions. Thomas O. Beebee and Ikuho Amano focus on Taishō period Japanese literature specifically listing pseudotranslation as one of the forms of transmesis in Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's works (Beebee and Amano 2010). They state that experimenting with the notion in some of his short stories may be perceived as an act of resistance against *genbunitchi* ideal and proletarian literature. The same idea of combining both transmesis and pseudotranslation is implemented by Şehnaz Tahir Gürçağlar in the analysis of Murat Gülsoy's works (Gürçağlar 2017). While paying attention to two incomparably different literary landscapes, both research papers refer to the dual nature of pseudotranslation. However, the methods they apply are as

diverse as the literatures they focus on: Beebee and Amano (2010) connect pseudotranslation to the biography and personal struggles of the writer while Gürçağlar (2017) analyses it in the context of creative self-reflection and reading experience. Beatrijs Vanacker and Tom Toremans in *Pseudotraduction. Enjeux métanfictionnels (Pseudotranslation and metafictionality)*, a special issue of the journal *Interférences littéraires/littéraire interferences* dedicated to pseudotranslation, on the other hand, discuss the concept in the framework of metafiction (Vanacker and Toremans 2016) describing its relations to inter- and hypertextuality. They propose to look at the issue from the point of view of literary tropes and conventions showing how pseudotranslation allows to create a multimodality of voices of the author, translator and editor which leads to the formation of paratexts. Moreover, they also perceive the structure of such texts as inevitably dual stating that they “thrive on this tension between construction and deconstruction, between strategies of authentication and the recognition of an underlying fictionality” (Vanacker and Toremans 2016; 32). As Ilse Logie (2017) demonstrates in the paper *The Stripped Fish: Translation and Culture in Mario Bellatin's Japanese Novellas* translated by Aletta Stevens, another direction to take includes negotiating the relationships that are formed between translation, intertextuality, and literary value. To do so, the “Japanese” novellas of Mario Bellatin, a Mexican-Peruvian writer, are analyzed. Exploring the influence of Japanese literature over his works, the paper focuses on the problems of originality, imitation, and intercultural communication (Logie 2017). To conclude, while the present overview has barely touched upon the general body of research on pseudotranslation conducted over the years, it is still clear that the topic is highly flexible and can be analyzed through the lens of literary and translation studies alike.

As no specific original source of pseudotranslations ever exists, it can be argued that the text stays influenced by two canons at once and maintains independence from them at the same time. By bringing the literary conventions of both countries together in one text, the writer makes them converse with each other on a level that extends beyond the notion of original. Moreover, since it succeeded in “deceiving” the reader and masking as an actual translation for a while, it also serves as an illustration of how the canon is nothing more than an artificial constraint that can be reinterpreted. Translation itself may be fictitious – but the way it shows the paradox of a “foreign” work being allowed more freedom than a domestic one is real. This is of course not the only example that shows how the concepts of translation and original can form grey zones. Besides these (arguably the most obvious) power relationships, there might exist another hierarchy that would include authors, translators, and readers.

Just as with original and translation, there are numerous options for all of them to interact with each other. From perceiving the reader as someone who has to be taught to engaging in a dialogue, the author is always free to choose how to present their work. In this equation the role of translator often remains both vague and unacknowledged. Is their function to preserve the meaning or preserve the form? How do the texts they produce reflect the existing dynamic between a language pair? Should they reflect it at all? When someone reads a translated book, do they converse with the author or the translator?

Even in the discourse of translation studies, it is hard to give definite answers to all of these questions. However, when handling the topic of pseudotranslation it becomes even more complicated. While in some conversations on authorship it might be possible to omit the translator, in this specific context they are as important as the author – if not equal to them. Pseudotranslation is never a *tete-a-tete* but a dialogue between the writer, the reader and the translator or even a polylogue between multiple

preexisting texts (as we saw on the example of the “Norwegian” novel) and the one someone is currently reading. To discover how it unfolds, it would be useful to proceed with a quick overview of the pseudotranslation in previous research. Moreover, as the question of how it relates to literary theory remains yet to be explained, another important task would be to fit it into the already established discourse – namely, the notion of intertextuality and the debates on the death of the author.

## 1.2 Pseudotranslation and the Death of the Author

As Toury pointed out in *Descriptive Translation Studies – and beyond*, pseudo (or fictitious) translations is not a new concept per se. He states that their emergence may be influenced by different factors, from experimenting with new literary forms to hiding the author’s identity (Toury 1995; 48). However, he proceeds to argue that, regardless of the background story in each specific case, they can still be analyzed within the framework of Translation Studies – exactly because they succeed in pretending to belong to this category (Toury 1995; 52). As demonstrated from the examples he shares including the one introduced in the previous section of this article, by crossing the borders of binary relationships between the source and target language, pseudotranslations highlight the role translated texts are attributed in a society. He also contemplates on the way this form of text can exaggerate the features of the presumable original insisting that “...a possibility, if not the need, to actually activate a non-existent original in the background of the text is often an integral part of its proper realization as an intended translation” (Toury 1995; 53). While I agree with this statement, later in the article I am planning to show how it is reverted in Itō Seikō’s *Atashi* that goes beyond the question of one’s culture and tries to make the notion of original appear more flexible.

Susan Bassnett extends the discussion on pseudotranslations dividing them into several types – namely, translations with no authentic source, self-translations, travel logs, invented and fictitious translations. She shows how for some of them (such as travel chronicles) the question of language is almost disregarded in favor of describing one’s experiences in a foreign land (Bassnett 1998). For some others, such as invented translation, this form is tightly connected to a deliberate attempt to experiment with one language and flavor it with the features of another (Bassnett 1998). It is possible to see that in many cases the decision to write a work as a pseudotranslation can offer a certain amount of anonymity – but I would state that it doesn’t have to be the only goal. In fact, this form can open the doors to creative freedom and experimenting with pre-established concepts, such as nationality or authorship.

As will be seen from the case study, questioning them both allows the readers to actively participate in the story instead of passively following it. The fictitious author, just as the fictitious translator, is not merely a narrator but rather someone who breaks the fourth wall to directly address a person who might happen to read the text, no matter who they are. This fact makes it relevant to discuss it in the context of the idea of the author being dead proposed by Roland Barthes in his eponymous essay titled *The Death of the Author* (1967). A central work that greatly contributed to the formation of intertextuality as a concept, it “frees” the author from the necessity to guide or educate the reader. Moreover, as Barthes argues it is now the reader who has the power over the text as they become “someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted” (Barthes 1967).

While it's possible to criticize the idea based on the fact that the reader might be just as clueless (if not more) as the author and is not necessarily able to make sense of a given book on their own, I would propose to see the acts of composing and reading it as inevitable cooperation. To investigate it, I will use a simple metaphor. If I am a tour leader and someone reading this article is a solo tourist that decided to book me, how pleasant our journey will be depends on both of us. In case I'm not experienced enough, it will be only me who can possibly contribute from it. Instead of following a certain strict path, we could wander off each time I see a glittering object – that might as well be just a pebble, not necessarily equally attractive for my companion. However, if I decide on a route and make them aware of my choice, it will still take two to enjoy the trip. While I can take the responsibility entirely on me, it's the other party that engages (or not) in a conversation on the places we go by and forms (or not) the connection to them on a level I might not be able to influence entirely – judging whether the journey was good or bad, fulfilling, or dull, beginner-friendly, or challenging. No matter what and how well I plan everything, it will never be only me who evaluates my work at the end of the day. The same applies to the authors-readers relationships.

The broad and hazy definition of who the reader is (a person reading a text at the moment? An abstract entity? Anyone except for the author?) in the discourse Bathes offers is both a challenge and a gate that can be opened using multiple different keys. Further extended by Gerard Genette, Michael Riffaterre, Harold Bloom, George Landow and others, it is flexible enough to welcome reinterpretations. While the first and most important fact is that the author is dead and not necessarily responsible for their work, it doesn't mean that they should be fully erased from the act of interpreting it. For the purpose of this article, I would propose to see the reader not as the only one who has unlimited power over a certain text but rather as someone who cooperates with the author in a joint quest - the search of the meaning.

Pseudotranslation allows one to look at the problem from a new angle by adding an (actual or imagined) translator to the process. Since there's no original to translate, their function becomes quite unclear – in fact, it may be argued that they are completely redundant. However, by disguising the work as a translation, the author can bring in the power relationships traditionally associated with it. This would be arguably impossible to do without “inventing” someone who can stay in between the source and the target culture. Therefore, usually unacknowledged or unnoticed, in this case the translator becomes an important element of the narrative, just as the author and the reader both do. In the following section I will analyze this paradox based on the case study using the topics of writing and authorship as an example.

## **2. When Writing Disappears**

In *Atashi* writing as a topic appears twice: first, within the story itself as one of its guiding motifs. It is mainly discussed through the attempts of the main character to establish herself as a writer in an unsupportive environment. However, the topic suddenly disappears along the way getting replaced by the others and is never referred to again up until the end. It is then expanded in the editor's note that follows the text. Within it, not only the question of writing but also authorship and the author-reader

relationships are contemplated upon so that the three become tightly entangled together.

To see how this change occurs, I will divide the discussion into two subsections – firstly, the question of writing within the story will be highlighted. I will then proceed to the editor’s note that engages in a conversation not only with *Atashi* but with a larger intertextual network, as well.

## 2.1 In – Writing in *Atashi*

*Atashi* is a simple story that follows the adventures of a Muslim girl getting stuck in a Chinese part of Kuala Lumpur among the downpour and discovering the ways to communicate with her hosts despite not knowing each other’s languages. It begins with the main character, Shiti walking down the streets of Kuala Lumpur to return the book about sign languages across the globe she borrowed from her brother’s school. We learn that her brother and mother are both deaf and she herself has troubles adjusting in school. During a sudden encounter with her friend called Salma we also discover that Shiti often submits writing compositions that seem unconventional and disturbing to her teacher – starting from an essay describing a corpse she saw lying on the street and ending with the attempts to share how guilty she feels because of her brother and mother who are supposedly being a great nuisance to other people around. Salma tries to encourage her friend to write more and promises to “always remain her reader”. However, Shiti feels ashamed of her compositions and keeps contemplating whether she should choose other topics. At this stage we can already see how the author-reader interaction is shown as something literal – the reader urges the author to stay truthful to herself. Moreover, the power relationships between them are reversed, as well – while the author is free to choose the topics, she is always dependent on external evaluation from the readers. Both characters that read her compositions (the teacher and the friend) are shown as antagonists – never engaging in a direct confrontation, they nevertheless keep contradicting each other. Salma rebukes the claims that Shiti’s work should be “easy to understand” for everyone juxtaposing herself against the majority of possible readers:

先生はみんなにわかるとか、みんなが気分よくとかいうけど、サルマにはあんたの作文がよくわかったし、別に気分がちっともよくなるけど、なんていうかわたしはあんたの話を«もっと»読みたいと思う (Itō Seikō 2013; 101)

She [the teacher] says to write it in a way everyone understands or finds pleasant, but I personally understood everything just fine and while it wasn’t the most pleasant read, I think I, you know, would love to read “more” of your stories.

However, in this competition it is the teacher who holds more power since Shiti pays closer attention to her words as an authority figure. At the same time, she is too unsure to make a definite decision regarding her own works by herself – be it conforming to conventions or continuing to write freely. Within the story, we only learn about these two readers whose opinions are always drastically different. The imbalance between them shows the vulnerability of a writer who can only create works as long as there’s a reader – and thus falls into the trap of being dependent on their evaluation. Therefore, echoing Barthes’ work, Itō Seikō creates a situation in which the reader and not the author can directly influence the text by voicing their opinion. We can see two possible reasons that allow it to happen – both Shiti’s age and her vulnerable position.

Growing up in an environment where not using the spoken language would be considered shōgai (障害) both in a sense of “disability” and a “hindrance”, Shiti tries to fit her own family’s history into this framework but does not seem to be able to do it. Writing about it is bound with a strong feeling of shame – but at the same time, she’s also ashamed of the way deaf people are treated in the cultural context she’s exposed to. For Shiti as a person from a marginalized background the question of what to write is bound with cultural constraints that are too strong to be easily broken. Therefore, she is more prone to trust the voice of an adult (and presumably more experienced) reader rather than someone she can engage in an equal conversation with.

In the middle of a dialogue with Salma, the rain starts pouring so Shiti is forced to take a bus instead of walking. She never arrives at the school as the downpour intensifies and people have to get off at a random street. Trying to find her way back home, Shiti gets lost and finds herself in the Chinese part of the city she has never been to before. Here she suddenly meets On Yō, a deaf Chinese man who can speak the Malay sign language, and his wife Ien, who can understand spoken Malay but is not very confident using it herself. They propose Shiti to take a shelter in their house until the rain stops, and she reluctantly agrees. This is also the point when writing suddenly disappears both from her thoughts and from the narrative.

However, even then she still continues to tell the story from the first-person perspective so that someone who happens to read *Atashi* replaces both Salma and the teacher and becomes the only reader. This transformation occurs flawlessly and naturally – the compositions are never mentioned again but they also lose their relevance compared to the experience of breaking the cultural and linguistic boundaries she tries to share with someone reading the text. Getting caught in the whirl of emotions caused by the encounter in Chinatown, Shiti completely focuses on this new plot.

Over the course of one evening they spent together, the three become close to each other as the feeling of initial awkwardness and fear changes into the illusion of always being a family. As soon as it stops raining, Shiti eventually returns back home but is invited to come over again. Writing is never directly mentioned at the end, as well – it might even be seen as if it completely vanishes somewhere along the way. But in reality, it still plays an important role for the bigger narrative. In fact, if we regard the editor’s note to be a part of the story, it’s possible to see how Itō Seikō returns to this topic – but from another, less obvious, angle this time. Never explicitly referred to as only writing as the process anymore, it gradually transcends into the related issue of authorship.

Moreover, we can also regard the story itself as an answer to the question of whether Shiti continues writing or not – while the readers never get a chance to read her earlier works or learn more about her life after the Chinatown adventure, they can still get access to *Atashi*. This fact can be seen as an illustration of how the reader becomes the co-creator of the text and helps it to attain a new meaning. On the surface, both writing and Shiti completely disappear as the editor’s note begins – but in reality, the sole existence of the short story serves as a hint towards its likely ending.

## 2.2 Out – Writing outside *Atashi*

The note begins by talking about the stories that disappear before they can acquire their audience. Giving the example of Franz Kafka whose works could have stayed unknown if his last will wish had



been accomplished and André Gide who wrote *The Counterfeiters* (1925) in a form of a novel-within-a-novel, the editor continues the discussion on what makes a “non-existent novel” real. Having started out in the beginning of the book (or to be more precise, the first editor’s note), it serves as a way to neatly connect *Atashi* to the other stories within it – and play with the reader.

First of all, we never learn who the editor is this time. By stating that the “translator” with a “very unique name”, 仮蜜柑三吉 (Karimikan Sankichi), who is presumably collecting the stories and translating them into Japanese, did not appear in this part of the book (つまり今回、仮蜜柑の出番はなかった (Itō Seikō 2013; 125)), they both make him one of the possible characters and break the notion of translation. If we read the text as such, how can the translator not be present? While it’s already known that *Atashi* was written fully in Japanese, in order to even consider something to be a translation, there should exist triangular relationships which include the author, the reader, and the translator. Otherwise, the question of the role each of them plays becomes meaningless. This returns us back to the notion of pseudotranslation – turning the concepts that should seem “self-evident” upside down, the text keeps deceiving the reader. We can never trust the narrator since their function is not to guide us – rather, to make us join the conversation.

If we try to do so, it’s possible to see how the editor is only telling the half-truth. Declaring that the translator did not appear doesn’t change the fact that he in fact did – and even twice so it’s hard not to notice him. Firstly, in the contents of *The Novel That Does Not Exist* the name of the translator for *Atashi* is stated as 仮蜜柑三吉 which creates a curious paradox. Who should the reader trust in this case – the writer who arranged the table of contents or the editor who tells that the translator was not present? Complicating the situation even more, the author of the note then declares that he was “imitating” him:

いわば私自身の作品の中にある[存在しない小説]をこの世へと“引きずり”出した。存在しない翻訳家・仮蜜柑三吉を模倣することで。(Itō Seikō 2013; 125)

In other words, I made the “non-existent” novel from my own texts real by imitating Karimikan Sankichi, the non-existent translator.

This is how the “presumably absent” translator makes their way into the text again confusing the reader and offering more questions than the answers - if they are not real, how can one imitate them? Are they, the writer, and the editor the same person hiding behind different pseudonyms? And what exactly can be meant by “imitation” in the context of pseudotranslation?

None of these questions gets an answer. Instead, the discussion moves back to the problem of writing a “non-existent novel” as the author of the note tries to give it a new definition. To do so, they extend the conversation not only beyond the story but also beyond the note itself reminding the reader of the previous observations on the topic:

前回、[存在しない小説]をこう定義した。“元のテキストをあらかじめ失ったまま、仮に一つの翻訳のバリエーションとしてだけ宇宙に存在する”と。(Itō Seikō 2013; 125)

Last time, I defined the “non-existent novel” as follows: a novel that has no original text right from

the beginning and only exists as a translated variation.

This broad definition allows to include a wide arrange of novels – starting from *The Counterfeiters* that can only be counted as a “translation” of a text that never existed independently and ending with *Atashi*. By declaring the original lost, it also challenges the concept of translation and the power relationships within it. As no source text can ever be found, the only way the reader can (theoretically) engage with it is through reading the “translation”. While being a pseudotranslation itself, the book never explicitly mentions the term provocatively extending the category of “actual” translation instead. This allows us to see how all the concepts applied in order to talk about it can be easily reversed – “original”, “translator”, “author” and the others become nothing but just words to play with. The first set of power relationships outlined earlier in the article – those between the languages – is being completely broken. When the original is not important anymore, they can only be seen as a formality.

Moreover, as we’ve already noticed before, this border is far from the only one that is being crossed. By playing with the notion of translation, Itō Seikō claims to “have taken up to the surface” the story that originally existed within his another book, *Back 2 Back* (2012) written together with Ataru Sasaki (佐々木中). Thus, *Atashi* is interwoven not only into the framework of *The Novel That Does Not Exist* but also converses with other texts.

Even considering all of this, we can still read the story independently from the editor’s note. However, the interpretation of the role writing plays both in and outside of it would likely be different. The note itself, as well, may serve as an example of a conversation between the author and the reader in the process of searching for a meaning of a specific text. The author is not necessarily cooperative – lots of clues are hidden behind the references or only hinted at. The translator especially is both erased from the text and remains a vital part of it at the same time. It is the function of the reader to analyze this fact and come to a certain conclusion, but the journey of interpretation is only possible as long as they try to follow the road outlined by the author.

Just like Shiti’s works are always influenced by an evaluation (whether critical or supportive), the story and the note can only exist as long as there’s someone to read them. Her struggles as a writer gradually dissolve from the text along the way as if they are completely unimportant. This process occurs so briefly it’s almost possible to decide that the author has lost their way. Maybe that’s not even entirely untrue – if one only has access to this one story. It takes effort to look outside of it and see how the motif of writing always remains here – but in another, expanded form. We can imagine the structure of both the story and the note as a huge yarn ball that’s hidden from sight. In the beginning, only one short thread (the topic of writing) is visible. If we keep pulling it, however, it becomes evident that the thread is in fact very long and expands further and further – so that the notions of authorships, translation, original, intertextuality and the others are tightly tangled to each other.

In this simple overview I tried to focus only on writing– but this is just one way of seeing the text. In the next section I will extend the discussion a bit further and analyze *Atashi* as a pseudotranslation. My main aim will be to show how the form contributes to the reader-writer conversation we just saw (or even possibly participated in).

### 3. *Atashi* as a Pseudotranslation

Fitting the story within the framework of pseudotranslation might not be as easy as it seems from the first glance. Being a typical example of a fictitiously translated text right from the premise, *Atashi* still makes one wonder about the purpose of choosing this specific form. I would argue that the reason to do so is the flexibility it offers. It is through pseudotranslation as a so-called “genre” that the concept of the death of the author is both illustrated and expanded. Dissolving the identity of the writer can be regarded as a way to “silence” the author and invite the reader to join. Moreover, we can also see how the responsibility of the first is allocated to the last since it’s the reader who chooses the way to interpret the text at the end of the day.

As shown in the previous section, *Atashi* can be analyzed from two points of view – as a single story and a story in a broader intertextual context. It not only extends up to the other texts included in *The Novel That Does Not Exist*, but also refers to one of Itō Seikō’s previous works. As a pseudotranslation, the story has an even larger family tree – since the author places it among the other books creating a broad category of “the texts that do not exist”, such as *The Counterfeiters*. All of them (except for *Atashi* itself) have nothing to do with translation – but show how fragile the notion of authorship can be. The personality, the name or the background of the author do not matter, just like those of the translator. What matters, however, is their polylogue with the reader and the works that were created before *Atashi*.

The text presented as a translation can arguably still be treated as such – but without the original it stays outside the binary relationship of the source and target language. The question of nationality, too, suddenly loses its meaning. Not carrying the function of portraying the cultural context, the text therefore frees itself from the constraints tied to a specific country. *Atashi* as a story is staged in Malaysia – but, as a pseudotranslation, it does not depend on a place. This distinguishes it from the example analyzed in the first part of the article that showed how it’s possible to disguise the text as a translation by bringing in the features of the literary canon of another country. The goal of *Atashi* is in fact completely different – not to create a mini-version of Malaysia within a Japanese text, but to erase both countries from it making it go beyond the issue of nationality.

Moreover, it is not the plot that matters as much as the connection of the text to other ones. The reader is free to trace it back (or not) trying to recreate the larger network, yet their version can never be completely correct nor wrong. This turns into some sort of a detective game as the author only maps the road out – but never explains anything and never becomes a guide. Pseudotranslation as a form turns journey from an excursion to an adventure. It still takes two to enjoy it, but their power relationships are not of the one who knows the way and the one who is blindly following them. It can rather be seen as discovering it together right from the beginning.

It is mainly the reader who makes sense of the text, thus allowing it to exist. The paradox of pseudotranslation here is taken to the extreme as they are even invited to join as coauthors. While the author is not necessarily completely “dead”, as proposed by Barthes, he is also not necessarily reliable. Therefore, as can be seen from the example of “removing” the translator from the text, in some cases the reader has to take a say and contradict him – or discover when he is only telling the half-truth. The power relationships between the two are still codependent but the reader is expected to be an active

participant instead of a passive follower.

Pseudotranslation as a form allows this conversation to go on by complementing the notion of the “death of the author”. In the case of *Atashi*, there are in fact two deaths we can observe – as the translator falls the second victim. However, “killing” both of them immediately dissolves the traditional power relationships so that “translation” is not dependent on the existence of “original”, and “the reader” does not have to be guided by “the author” anymore. Adding a third figure to the concept, Itō Seikō not only shows how it can be applied in the framework of Translation Studies but also empowers the reader – and pseudotranslation being a borderline notion fully enables him to do so.

#### 4. Conclusion – Alive or a Lie?

Throughout the article “killing” the author (as well as the translator) has been mentioned multiple times. But are they both really dead in *Atashi*? I would believe they are not. In fact, the whole story together with the editor’s note can be seen as an extended conversation between them and the reader – and not the easiest one to follow. If I go back to the banal metaphor with the tour, I will even have to admit that the guide we booked doesn’t share their plans very easily. Moreover, they are not even always reliable so that we have to correct them along the way. The existence of the translator, too, often serves as an additional source of possible irritation. Are they also joining our journey? Do they exist at all? Is our guide imitating multiple voices? (Which would probably be quite disturbing if it was an actual tour).

We can never answer these questions for sure, but we can see how pseudotranslation allows the author to be playful and deceitful at the same time. The text might not kill the author but what it does erase are the boundaries – those between the translation and the original, the author and the reader, one country and another. The author within the story is not a reliable narrator but someone who invites the reader to join them in the quest of searching for meaning. This involves both questioning the preexisting borders and deciphering what is written and what is only hinted at. *Atashi* consists of multiple layers that extend both within and beyond the text. Following the way the topic of writing transforms into the notion of authorship, this article has barely touched upon only one of them. However, even this already allows to see how pseudotranslation as a form is closely connected to the death of the author.

In contemporary Japanese literature specifically, this connection might have several implications which I would like to briefly touch upon. Firstly, applying Barthes’ idea helps to create a broader network of earlier and later books that is not necessarily bound to one country. In fact, intercultural and intertextual conversations are more than welcome. Secondly, breaking the power relationships between the writer and reader opens the doors for more experimental, multidimensional works. In Japanese context, the way it relates to the concept of “transnational” literature (*ekkyō bungaku*) would be especially interesting to investigate further. Usually closely tied to one’s nationality, it appears to be strictly inflexible – but what may change if we place *Atashi* and other stories from *The Novel That Does Not Exist* within it?

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