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The Multiverse of *Delirium*

The Case for the Editor as Creator and for Production Studies

I

One morning in the summer of 2005, the editor Anton Mueller read the English translation of *Turing's Delirium* that he had just received in his office at Houghton Mifflin, and that afternoon, as he would matter-of-factly tell author Edmundo Paz Soldan, he started rewriting it.[1]

The moment of truth had arrived for the much-anticipated novel from the Bolivian author that *The New York Times* predicted would usher in a new wave of Latin American writers. It was in Mueller's power to greenlight the publication of Lisa Carter's translation, or to activate a kill switch in the contract. He decided on a third course: to remake the book.

This moment, as if straight from one of the Borgesian parables that fascinate Paz Soldan, opened a fork in the timeline of Latin American letters, a parallel existence of Latin American letters within US letters. The distinct version of the novel *Turing's Delirium* created within the US market would in turn give rise to another version of its author, a duplicate Paz Soldan whose work would follow a separate arc. I can imagine other moments key to the divergence of timelines within and between these letters: Jonathan Galassi and Lorin Stein contemplating publishing Roberto Bolaño posthumously with Farrar, Straus, and Giroux; Valeria Luiselli discussing each draft of *Lost Children Archive* with her editors at Knopf, and then changing her text in Spanish translation. It was never inevitable that Latin America would be represented by the same authors and texts in Barcelona, Paris, and New York. But these moments serve as a reminder that even when we are seemingly reading the same authors and texts, the corpus is different, transformed by what Álvaro Enrigue calls the encounter of the Latin American author with the "literary–industrial complex" in the United States.[2] The result are texts

1 Unless otherwise noted, all references to the transcript from class visits by Paz Soldan (in person) and Lisa Carter (remote) January, 2009, World literature courses taught by Paulo Lemos Horta, World Literature program, Simon Fraser University.

2 Personal communication, New York, 15 Feb 2019.

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as substantially different as distinct cuts of the same film released to serve different national markets, with attendant shifts in the reception and stature of the auteurs.

Such forks in the literary timeline should bring into focus the multiple roles of editors at publishing houses: not only their instigative role, but also their creative one.[3] There is a need to disentangle different agencies and creativities at play, in the "literary–industrial complex" identified by Enrigue. As literary scholars we've disabused ourselves of notions of individual genius, even of authorship, but somehow, too often seem beholden to assumptions that the author and the translator remain in control of the text even when contracts are drawn up that place final authority over the publication, both whether it proceeds and what shape it takes, with the publisher and editor. When juxtaposing originals with translations, scholarship too readily ascribes any changes to authors and translators, as if these had "final cut" authority, superseding editorial, marketing, and all other publishing considerations. We've expanded the archive from the agency of the author to that of the translator, but need to go further, to include the editor.[4] Otherwise literary histories run the risk of defaulting to a pyramid of creative agency with the author on top alongside the translator and the editor somewhere down the line, at the level of a copyeditor who makes helpful suggestions the author may accept or reject – as if the editor operated only at the margins of the text, with no say in the essence of the finished text as a literary work.

As the case of *Turing's Delirium* demonstrates, the editor, author, and translator operate under different assumptions, pressures, and interests, both individually and structurally. Their perspectives on the same act of editorial intervention, can also, as in this case, conflict: salvage operation (for Mueller), improvement of the literary text (for Soldan), or its dilution and impoverishment (for Carter). Nuance is needed. This was hardly a case of the autonomy of the literary field being undermined by the dictates of commerce. What the process reveals is the editor invested and involved in the crafting of the text as a literary work. The editor should not be reduced to an agent of commerce any more than the author should

3 A rare recognition for editors is given alongside translators in the TA First Translation Prize endowed in 2017 by the British Council, Jo Heinrich and Daniel Hahn, who also delivered the following year a keynote at the annual meeting of Mediterranean Editors & Translators, "In praise of editors (the translator's view)".

4 No disciplines such as "production studies" or "editing studies" exist to rival translation studies. As Hahn's abstract for his 2018 MET keynote accurately put it, "Translators still complain rather a lot about how under-valued their work is, how under-appreciated, and under-recognised. But they're positively celebrities compared to their editor colleagues who – like them – do work that can make or break a book, but whose names are almost never to be found in any public credits". https://www.metmeetings.org/en/in-praise-of-editors-the-translators-view:1130.

be fetishized as an autonomous creator who would brook no compromise with the imperative to find readers in a foreign market.

Paz Soldan was in good hands. In the early 2000s, at Houghton Mifflin Anton Mueller had the power to envision books the authors themselves had not, commissioning narrative nonfiction from contributors to *The New York Times*; the authority to pay out a six-figure advance for an unknown Canadian author; and the confidence to roll out a national tour to promote a Tibetan author he felt warranted comparisons to Günter Grass and Gabriel García Márquez.[5] Mueller would come to describe his strengths in terms of reading and anticipating the zeitgeist, with a list strong on current events and trend-driven fiction and nonfiction. Here was an editor who could make, or remake, a foreign author for an American present.

With Paz Soldan, Houghton Mifflin ought to have been riding the crest of a new wave of Latin American writing, and there would have been few indications that, after Mueller signed *El delirio de Turing* following its 2003 publication in Bolivia, the translation would require a salvage operation.

In 2003 the *New York Times* had proclaimed the dawn of a new era for Latin American literature centered around authors such as Edmundo Paz Soldan and Jorge Volpi, then in their mid-thirties, and their McOndo and Crack movements, which had begun in Latin America in 1996 (Laporte 2003). These works, along with the movements they were part of, aimed to resonate with a global audience, reflecting a moment of perceived unprecedented interconnectivity and cultural exchange. It was to be a new "boom". But this time the confidence with which the *Times* placed these bets was not based on the sales phenomenon of a *Cien años de soledad*, which had made headlines in the late 1960s, when it sold out print runs, first in Buenos Aires then in Barcelona and Madrid, before repeating the feat in Paris and New York. The threshold here was not breakthrough commercial success for a Latin American author in Europe, as it had proven to be with Gabriel García Márquez.

This time the new "boom" was to take to place in translation, via these authors' US publication. For all the spin of Volpi's US publisher that sought to present *In Search of Klingsor* as an established international bestseller in the vein of Umberto Eco's *In the Name of Rose*, prior to its publication in the States, the sales were all projected. Frankfurt had bowed before Volpi and *Klingsor* sold to a dozen major markets not due to Márquezean sales in Mexico or elsewhere, but

5 On commissioning Timothy Egan's *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl*, see Gwinn (2006); on the six-figure advance Mueller secured for Newfoundland author Michael Crummey's debut *River Thieves*, see Martin (2001); and on the national tour for Alai's *Red Poppies*, see Baker (2001).

due to the notorious six-figure advance secured for him from the Simon & Schuster group by the world's most powerful literary agent, Andrew Wylie. Here was a promissory note as good as sales, as good as gold, justifying the Wagnerian ambitions evoked by Volpi's title. This was a novel phenomenon, a merger-enabled, advance-led effort to establish a Latin American author in the United States, in lieu of a critical or commercial track record.

This was a new plan: that the international bestseller status proclaimed on the cover of the US edition would materialize in the US market itself and then drive sales elsewhere, particularly in Europe. Simon and Schuster's $200,000 advance for the novel would serve as collateral of sorts, guaranteeing Volpi and Wylie at Frankfurt contracts in major European markets. It was not an unreasonable plan – a major trade advance in New York for a bright young US author might just generate enough buzz in Spain or Germany to justify the cost. But it was another matter to pull off this feat on behalf of an unknown Latin American author. Wylie floated the prospect of a different kind of boom, to be dictated from New York to Europe and Latin America.

For Mueller and Houghton Mifflin, the problem was that by the time the translation of *Turing's Delirium* had been delivered in summer of 2005, Volpi's *In Search of Klingsor*, which had claimed the larger advance, had sunk like a stone in the US market, and could not even justify the translation of the further volumes in Volpi's trilogy of the twentieth century. What was supposed to have been the novel's greatest strength, its handling of physics, was called into question in the most prominent review it received, in *The Guardian* (Morton 2003). *In Search of Klingsor* had secured neither highbrow credibility nor the broad thriller sales promised by the comparisons to *The Name of the Rose*. The novel didn't sell at all, was remaindered, and the house took a $200,000 loss. This was not the kind of performance that inspired confidence among US editors in the other writers they had signed from McOndo and Crack. In the view of scouts and editors, Volpi weighed down the entire field; his name was mentioned as an excuse not to sign even the most gifted Latin American author, with the most enthusiastic scouting report from an exacting Italian or French press, notably Roberto Bolaño.[6] As a result, existing contracts were being voided, a possibility Edmundo Paz Soldan was only too. Sales matter, and it is vital for the literary historian and critic to know the actual data. In this case, sales figures underscore that the advance for *Klingsor* ultimately was held against other Latin

6 More in my forthcoming book on publishing: *'Rotten Little Worlds': Foreign Fictions in National Markets*.

American writers and rather than paving the way, delayed or made impossible their publication in the United States or United Kingdom.[7]

Upon receiving a first sample from *Turing's Delirium*, the masterfully trend-conscious Mueller quickly saw that it would not hit in the United States as youth culture. *El delirio de Turing* takes place during the decisive week of a popular uprising against a rise in electricity prices in the fictional city of Río Fugitivo. An elusive hacker, Kandinsky, threatens the Black Chamber, a state security body responsible for deciphering codes, even one of its chief codebreakers, nicknamed Turing, begins to question his work. If these protests were inspired by the demonstrations against the real-life water concession Aguas de Tunari, which plagued Cochabamba in 2000, Paz Soldan transferred the action from the streets to the internet and virtual reality. The conflict between young hacktivists and agents of state cyber security is reminiscent of Keanu Reeves' role in *The Matrix*. Paz Soldan was fascinated with a youth culture that sought to destroy the old order without having a vision to build toward; in his own paraphrase, "knock it down today and tomorrow we will think about rebuilding".[8]

Turing's Delirium illustrates the challenges in editing a young Latin American author for the American market. McOndo authors, announcing their arrival in 1996, articulated their break with magic realism as generational. Their desire was to describe the industrial, globalized cities they lived in rather than paint quaint portraits of the hinterland, which they felt the publishing establishment demanded of them. *Newsweek* picked up on the movement's boast of including only authors under 35. McOndo authors were aggressively in tune with the rhythm and lingo of new tech, gadgets, the internet, new media, and pop culture from US-born literary fads to local rock bands. If the vision of youth in newly wired and global cities was often celebratory, Paz Soldan's vision was more ambiguous. His youth are technologically savvy, but not necessarily sure of how to deal with each other or the public sphere. The hacker subculture with which Paz Soldan identified knew what it did *not* want but was less clear on its goals. If characters in Fuguet's early fiction are emancipated by tech, Paz Soldan's are emotionally

7 In this regard Wylie's ability to sell *Klingsor* at Frankfurt to several major translation markets is misleading: since the deals did not translate into sales or success in the US or any major European market, translation contracts for Volpi alone wouldn't guarantee him further publication in English, much less other Latin American writers.

8 Translator Lisa Carter, in contrast, did not relate "so much" to "the technology and extremism aspects", even as she found, as in her own experience of living in Latin America, the impact of "big business and globalization more noticeable because of divide between rich and poor in Latin America". Paz Soldan and Lisa Carter class visits, World Literature program, Simon Fraser University, January 2009.

numbed by virtual reality and have developed carpal tunnel syndrome. The challenge to pitch these authors in the US market only grew in the mid-2000s, a decade after the emergence of McOndo, when trade houses were left with the task of selling authors pushing forty as channeling the teen experience. *Newsweek* did its best, describing writers in their late thirties as "overgrown" college students (Newsweek Staff 2002). But this detail only highlighted the lifting required by marketing and editorial.

Mueller would later make headlines with his belief in the need to synchronize releases between the US and UK (Nelson 2008), and few titles can illustrate the need for simultaneous publication across markets as well as *Turing's Delirium*. In 2003 Bolivia, the book arrived in sync with all the latest trends, the multilingualism of the youth who sprinkled their Spanish with "fuck", the conspicuous display of branded clothing and gadgets, the currency of online platforms, and the fascination with the virtual reality of *The Matrix* and *Snow Crash*. The book arrived as the harbinger of newness and youth culture and scooped up a national book award. Paz Soldan, from his perch at Cornell, had the advantage of delivering a much sought after globalized, US-informed take, on the impact of neoliberal globalization on Bolivian society. His young characters even worried that the embrace of English and Anglicisms might threaten Spanish. But three years later, in the US in 2006, it was far from obvious that this sense of synchrony would work the other way – that the work would arrive under the banner of youth and in sync with the latest slang and tech. Did youth in the US crave portrayals of Latin-American youth's embrace of Americana? Even if marked by a lag that would date fads in clothing, brands, tech, gadgets, and online culture? Were Y2K and *Matrix* culture still a thing? A third of a decade is a long time in youth culture.

Penning *El delirio de Turing*, Paz Soldan operated from expectations he had gleaned from Mueller pertaining to *The Matter of Desire*, his first novel to be published in English. The niche he inhabited in the US market, as he understood it from Mueller, was that of a foreign author of literary fiction with a campus audience, which might be expected to sell 6,000–8,000 copies of a novel. Mueller had opted to release *The Matter of Desire* straight to paperback in order to chase student readers. This move gave Paz Soldan the distinct impression that the market was there for his fiction about young people, for young people. It is with this assurance that he had embarked on *El delirio de Turing* and *Los vivos y los muertos*. Paz Soldan himself had attended college in the United States on a soccer scholarship so he felt he could speak to the kind of sporty youth culture he explored in the latter book.

Mueller's initial misgivings about *Turing's Delirium* were evident in the first tidings Paz Soldan received from the editor, via the translator Carter. The publisher felt the novel was trying a bit too hard in the requisite of capturing youth-

speech; its youth were too keen to be hip. Between the lines, one could grasp the trade house's takeaway: college students would not be persuaded either. Mueller intuited, though author and translator did not, the likelihood this might not be a paperback release in the fashion of *The Matter of Desire* after all. Paz Soldan answered Carter that if it seemed like the young characters were trying too hard to be up to date, that was because what might seem banal in the States, such as listening to music on an mp3 player, was conspicuous and a status symbol for youth in Bolivia. Unanswered was the editor's underlying question of why this should appeal to North American readers.

Paz Soldan's first instinct was to send Lisa Carter back to the drawing board for the chapters featuring young hackers and protagonists, and placing the emphasis, and perhaps the blame, on her. He was invested in the chapters centering on the young hacker Kandinsky, which he most related to and had enjoyed writing. Carter stood her ground and countered that the translation reflected characters' three-dimensionality or lack thereof in the novel as she experienced them. Whereas *The Matter of Desire*, which is set in motion by a campus affair, had won her over with its different perspectives – both roving professor and young graduate student – here she felt the middle-aged male protagonists more well-rounded and the women and youth less so. Flavia and Kandinsky were most interesting to her when online and in chat rooms; outside of the virtual world they did not seem as fully realized.

Upon receiving the full draft translation, Mueller saw enough in the text to make it viable for publication, whatever his misgivings about its presentation of youth. But as a publisher with an interest in memoirs of drug abuse and in nonfiction about cyber security,[9] he concluded that these threads in *Turing's Delirium* were not sufficiently persuasive to carry the book through. Characters that served as foils to the hacker Kandinsky had to gain stronger contours and richer motivations. This was vital in a multi-vocal book with seven narrators. In terms of politics, the novel could not just trade in on the youthful energy and lingo of a hacker culture that wanted to tear down the existing order. This plot would have to be balanced with more persuasive accounts of how its middle-aged characters had grown tired of compromising with the regime.

It is here that Mueller saw room for his own intervention, and was not shy of proposing that the Bolivian author give his repentant regime collaborators more political and less personal motivations. The novel he envisioned would have a dis-

9 Notably, as executive editor at Bloomsbury USA, he acquired and edited *New York Times* reporter Nicole Perlroth's novelistic nonfiction account of the market for cyberweapons, *This Is How They Tell Me the World Ends*, Bloomsbury, 2021, which invited comparisons to John le Carré.

tinct center of gravity with a greater emphasis on taking political accountability that would resonate more with the arcs of the mature characters. This was not going to be a novel that caught fire with American youth. If the novel was to reach campus, it would more likely be read by professors like Paz Soldan himself. It is difficult to overstate the extent to which Mueller took charge of the editorial process. Mueller had already felt confident enough to ask Edmundo Paz Soldan to rewrite the ending of *The Matter of Desire*. Now he asked Paz Soldan not only to cut key scenes involving those around Miguel Sáenz (nicknamed Turing) and Cardona, but to go back to his previous drafts and find or write more material for particular characters such as the historian Ruth. Paz Soldan dutifully reincorporated an early chapter centering on the historian, which he had felt slowed down the narrative, as well as accepting the streamlining of timelines, reordering of chapters, and writing new material on Cardona and Miguel Sáenz.

Even as Mueller sought to rescue the publication of the novel in English, this editing-mediated shift in the novel's center of gravity away from the hacker Kandinsky proved the kiss of death to forecasts of a new Latin American wave of young authors writing about and for youth. Scholars of McOndo and Crack sometimes mistake buzzy puff pieces in the press as evidence of an actual wave of Latin American fiction in translation. American demand for youthful, globalized fictions of Latin America did not in fact materialize. Reading the scholarship, one would think Volpi had performed a feat anticipating that of Christopher Nolan with *Oppenheimer*, of attracting young people to a work of culture dealing with the machinations in the midcentury race in physics for the atom bomb. That did not happen; and if Nolan benefitted from physicists' approval and admiration for his grasp of the science, the opposite proved the case with Volpi, outed as out of his depth with regard to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in the *Guardian*.[10] As a result, rather than proving Americans could be interested in Latin American musings on science, the failure of *In Search of Klingsor* had proved the reverse for those in US trade publishing, and attested to an environment less, not more, receptive to musings about hacking from Bolivia.

10 *The Guardian* corrects Volpi: "Heisenberg's uncertainty principle means that science cannot provide a complete account of any state of affairs; it does not mean that 'science can offer only vague and random approximations of the cosmos'" (Morton 2003).

II

It is fascinating to consider how differently the translator and author reacted to and assessed the impact of Mueller's editorial interventions in the English text of *Turing's Delirium*.

The Canadian translator was the driving force that brought Paz Soldan to the American market. She had moved to Peru in 1993 and freelanced there and in Mexico. When she moved back to Canada in 2001 she picked up *Amores imperfectos* and "was absolutely captivated." She had been taken by the powerful images in this book, which includes a story of a man who spies on his daughter making love with strangers who increasingly resemble him. Not many young writers from Latin America were being translated, and these stories struck Carter as different from those of other authors. And so she began to translate *Amores imperfectos*. Also, in 2001, she wrote Paz Soldan to ask if he was looking for a translator. He was keen, as his agent hoped to pitch *La materia del deseo* to US publishers. So she visited Paz Soldan in Ithaca and they worked together on both *Amores imperfectos* and *La materia del deseo*, in which a professor returns to Bolivia after an affair with a graduate student in search of information about his father, a leftist leader assassinated by the dictatorship. The distribution of labor made it clear Carter hoped to see *Amores imperfectos* in print in the United States alongside *La materia del deseo*.

Carter would prove less amenable to Mueller's changes than Paz Soldan himself. Just as it had in his earlier work, the unsettling exploration of sexual taboos in *Turing's Delirium* fascinated her. In the novel, Turing indulges in the fantasy of sleeping with his teenage daughter with increasing realism. Visiting a call girl his daughter's age, Turing sees the resemblance, imagining it would be greater if the sex worker wore her hair in the same style as his daughter. In a flashback, his daughter suspects he took sexual pleasure from watching her play with Barbies. The theme of incest runs through the book as a dark undercurrent of the new possibilities made possible by consumerism, virtual reality, and online pornography. (Turing's ostensible motive for visiting a sex worker is to live out the fantasy of sleeping with a Californian cheerleader.) Another protagonist, the Minister of Justice Cardona, is haunted by his passion for a young cousin, a victim of the dictatorship, who for him will remain preternaturally young. Mueller, however, was unconvinced that these dark sexual themes added value. The Barbie scene had to be cut, not because it was too much, but because in a sense, it was too little: Mueller told Paz Soldan in no uncertain terms that if there were scenes suggesting incest, incest would have to be a central theme of the entire novel. In turn, Cardona would now have to possess an alternative political motivation for his turn against the regime.

Paz Soldan understood the wisdom of his editor's intervention. For him, "it had been a great call." He agreed "incest in the novel wasn't fully thought through, it was an issue too big to be left in, which deserved its own novel."[11] Perhaps he meant his next novel, *Los vivos y los muertos*, which featured more explicitly imperfect loves. But the Canadian translator would remain unpersuaded. Her sense was that the "book lost something with the radical shift in the protagonist's motivation (removing any hint of incestuous desire) and absolutely became more conventional, less disruptive in English." She understood why Paz Soldan had agreed to the changes: "editors at the Big 5 had total say and sway" and "Edmundo couldn't (I believe) jeopardize what he hoped would be a long and fruitful publishing career by pushing back."[12] But for her, there was a cost. Cardona had a more personal and interesting dimension with the guilt he felt serving the regime that had tortured and killed his young cousin. The change removed the emotion that could have been felt, presumably by the character and the reader. She was likewise unpersuaded by the changes made to Turing's narrative. Her comments suggested the entire family psychology had been hollowed out. She spoke of Ruth as flat and unconvincing, perhaps, I might add, in the absence of the subtext that might have better explained her anger at her husband. Carter commented that Flavia only came to life online; her inability to connect with others in real life, I would add, might have made even more sense in the original within the context of her father's desire for her.

If Mueller's interest in 2005 was in fulfilling Houghton Mifflin's side of a contract that concluded with *Turing's Delirium*, Carter had a more expansive view of the corpus by Paz Soldan she hoped to see in the United States. So she had a different take on what was essential to *Turing's Delirium*. Emboldened by the paperback release of *The Matter of Desire* for students, Paz Soldan had doubled down in the enterprise of writing novels that captured the rhythm, lingo, and sex lives of youth in *Los vivos y los muertos*, a small town farcical tragedy set at a US high school with notes of Gus Van Sant's 1995 *To Die For*. The new work also explored why youth found it difficult to relate, experience, and connect in a highly mediated world of gadgets and online catfishing and general artifice and deception. Seen as the middle act of a trilogy or tetralogy of works touching upon "inappropriate desire,"[13] which includes *Amores imperfectos, La materia del deseo* and *Los vivos y los muertos*, *Turing's Delirium* reads quite differently for Carter than it did for Mueller. For her, the personal motivations of Turing and Cardona in Paz Sol-

11 Paz Soldan class visit, January, 2009, World Literature program, Simon Fraser University.

12 Lisa Carter, email to Paulo Lemos Horta, 11 Nov 2023, 4:59pm.

13 The term is Lisa Carter's. Lisa Carter class visit, January 2009, World Literature program, Simon Fraser University.

dan's original Spanish text seem less minor and extraneous. They possess a politics of their own that would make better sense of the otherwise peculiar actions of Turing's wife Ruth and daughter Flavia.

But Carter lacked the clout to push back on changes she did not agree with. And the novel Lisa Carter read in Spanish and delivered in a complete English translation to Anton Mueller at Houghton Mifflin no longer exists in either tongue. After its publication in the United States, Paz Soldan, genuinely persuaded that Mueller's interventions were improvements, changed the text of the "original" for its subsequent editions in Spanish. The timeline of a *Turing's Delirium* that reflected Paz Soldan exploring inappropriate desire across several fictions was buried and erased and superseded by a timeline shaped by the versions of *El delirio de Turing* now in print in Spanish and English. Like so much Latin American writing that resonates in US academia, his next novel to be published in English deals with migration, and indeed was released by an academic press (University of Chicago). The book was *El Norte,* translated by Valerie Miles. In place of the tetralogy Lisa Carter had imagined, the three novels that exist in English (*The Matter of Desire, Turing's Delirium,* and *El Norte*) make for a more political triptych, in which the theme of migration gains greater saliency and the professor-student affair that catapults the plot of *The Matter of Desire* may seem almost out of place.

Based on her trajectory as a translator, Carter's sense of foreboding with regard to Mueller's changes to *Turing's Delirium* proved justified. If the excision of the more personal motivations for its protagonists felt like higher stakes to her, they were. If the English version proved to be, in the Bolivian author's summation, a collaboration between Mueller, Carter and himself, Carter was most invested of the three in what struck her as most unorthodox in the text. She had made a bet on his very inappropriateness, envisioning a long association doing justice to this register for the American market. She would not see into print *Amores imperfectos* and *Los vivos y los muertos*, both of which she had partially translated for no up-front compensation. Translating Paz Soldan did lead Carter to more literary translations for Houghton Mifflin and HarperCollins, but these dried up relatively quickly. She had hoped to keep translating work by young and previously unknown writers. She proved correct in her fear that her bet on a young Latin American author would not pay off, either for her or for other young Latin American writers. Among the authors she translated without seeing their books into print were the Bolivians Juan Lechin and Veronica Ormachea, the Colombian Virginia Vallejo, the Mexican Jorge Fabregas, and the Latino-Canadian writers Camila Reimers and Claudio Palomares. In the end, Mueller's decision to pass on *Los vivos y los muertos* hurt her the most. It didn't affect Paz Soldan's tenure at Cornell University or his own literary reputation in English, and Muel-

ler would land a job at Bloomsbury after his dismissal from Houghton Mifflin. Carter was the one who ultimately couldn't continue with her literary career.

This is not to say that one should privilege her interpretation of Mueller's rationale for the changes above his or Paz Soldan's own takes. As a translator working with publishers, but also battling against them, she became accustomed to seeing their every move as commercially motivated. Even as she translated for the trade presses Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and HaperCollins, she fought publishers for greater recognition of translators – for "copyright, their names on the cover, royalties". In these fights, the publishers' commercial rationale was clear. This carried over into her perception that changes of the sort Mueller made to *Turing's Delirium* must represent a dilution of the literary text in the interest of making it more palatable to a broader audience.

But in fact, there is nothing in Mueller's track record along the lines of prudishness. One need only consider his editing of Edmund White's memoir about his years in Paris, which the author credits Mueller with completely reshaping. On the contrary, Mueller kept in scenes, passages, and references that might have made White's memoir unpublishable in France because of privacy and defamation laws.[14] The same was true of with the memoirs Mueller edited about drug abuse. And more broadly, with regard to his attitude toward risk taking – Mueller has backed authors who did very risky things, such as parodying the racism of *Gone with the Wind*[15] or appropriating a Native American voice and identity. If anything, Mueller's track record demonstrates a high risk tolerance, in particular with regard to literary representations of sex, drug use, and controversy, that ought to have made him particularly open to the inappropriateness of the desire in *El delirio de Turing* and *Los vivos y los muertos*.

If one accords Mueller's career the kind of long-term, nuanced contextual consideration granted to the career of an author – and increasingly, a translator – there is not much evidence of an allergy to sexual provocation or ambiguity. It seems more likely that Carter and Mueller, with their distinct goals, had different contexts in mind. Carter was thinking of the other writing by Paz Soldan that she had translated and hoped to see in print (which would better contextualize desire in *Turing's Delirium*). Meanwhile, as an editor, Mueller was primarily concerned

14 Liz Garrigan, "The City of Light and Love: Edmund White talks with *Chapter 16* about his dishy, sexy new memoir of life in Paris", *Chapter 16*, 7 Jul 2022. White implies Mueller was more permissive than his previous editor ("My regular editor has conveniently 'retired,' so he doesn't have to deal with this landmine of a book").

15 Mueller's deposition at the trial surrounding the *Wind Done Gone* controversy is referenced in Melvin Simensky, "The Role of Parody in Copyright: is a New Wind Blowing? Introduction", Media Law and Policy, 10, 2, Spring 2002.

with the reader's experience of reading *Turing's Delirium* as a stand-alone text. Mueller wasn't fully persuaded by the desires for the daughter and cousin as motivations for Miguel and Cardona within the novel. This is precisely where Paz Soldan landed, and it would be perhaps too cynical to say he agreed just for the sake of appeasing his American editor. Everyone I have spoken to from Paz Soldan himself to his collaborators speaks of him as particularly open to suggestions, believing translators and editors can improve his prose. This was Lisa Carter's own impression of her work with him on *The Matter of Desire*; and that of Valerie Miles, doubling as translator and informal editor, with *El Norte*.[16] After all, Paz Soldan was under no obligation to introduce Mueller's changes into subsequent Spanish editions of *El delirio de Turing*, but he chose to do so.

And it makes little sense to imagine Mueller "dumbing down" the difficulty of a Paz Soldan novel for a broad audience, when the evidence suggests he never had such a wide audience in mind for the Bolivian author. Released in 2004, *The Matter of Desire*, envisioned as a campus novel, would not meet its modest target for a major trade press of 8,000 copies sold, falling 2,000 short. Early on, reading a first extract from the translation, Mueller had given up on even selling 6,000 copies of *Turing's Delirium* in paper for a similar audience. The commercial course of action would have been to kill the contract, as some of his colleagues at other presses did for McOndo and Crack authors in the wake of the Volpi fiasco, evoking the disappointment of *In Search of Klingsor* to spare Houghton Mifflin the hassle and the expense of bringing out *Turing's Delirium*. Rather, Mueller sought to ensure the novel would cohere for that small subset of readers interested in serious literary fiction in translation as a work on that end of the spectrum – low on the midlist and far from the bestseller list. Mueller's labor on the novel is interesting precisely because it was literary.

Conclusion

Mueller's editorial intervention, reframing *Turing's Delirium* as a novel about political responsibility, is a fascinating fork in the road of Latin American letters, opening a diverging path for Paz Soldan in American letters. Leading to the publication of *El Norte*, but bypassing the publication of much of his other work in the United States, that path changes the character of both novel and author. Mueller's recut of *Turing's Delirium* should interest scholars not because it was a case of exceptional editorial intervention, but because it exemplifies the degree of trans-

16 Valerie Miles, in conversation, Barcelona, 23 Apr 2023.

formation that other works of contemporary Latin American fiction undergo in the United States such as Valeria Luiselli's *Story of My Teeth* (which also changed characters and reordered and retitled chapters). And as should be evident to anyone flitting between New York, Barcelona, and Paris, the canon of Latin American fiction as it takes shape in the United States increasingly does not follow the same lines as in France or Germany, let alone Spain or Latin America. The American literary production process, from commissioning and signing to editing works like Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* and Paz Soldan's *El Norte*, is subject to the centrifugal pull of an American context and terms of political debate and a focus on migration. For publishers from Knopf to the University of Chicago Press, it matters if such works can be absorbed into a Latinx American experience and broader American cultural and social debates.

No doubt there have been other forks in the road, and works such as *The Death of Artemio Cruz* by Carlos Fuentes had their chronologies and characters straightened out and chapters reordered as far back as the 1960s. But this particular divergence feels more distinct, as the branches of Latin American fiction abroad have been growing further and further apart since the 2000s. If Fuentes, Vargas, and García Márquez were central to a boom of Latin American letters in the 1960s and 1970s in Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Barcelona, Paris, Frankfurt, and New York (one could quibble about the relative standing of more peripheral figures), there is no such consensus on who would represent the leading Latin American authors today across all these cities. With her MacArthur "Genius" grant, mid-six-figure advance for *Lost Children Archive*, laudatory coverage in *The New York Times*, and Ivy league teaching position, Valeria Luiselli leads the emerging canon of Latin American writers from the perspective of the American market, ahead of writers such as Mariana Enriquez, Samanta Schweblin, and Fernanda Melchior. But that ranking would be upended from the perspectives of Barcelona or Madrid, and Luiselli barely registers in France, where she ranks far behind Latin American authors who are much less well known in the United States. National markets and institutions for dispensing prestige seem that much more far apart in France and the United States today. A Nobel might drive six-figure sales in the former but not the latter, while a Harvard teaching position, a MacArthur, and a generous advance from Knopf do not guarantee top billing in Paris.

My point here is that it would be hard to compare or reconcile the critical and commercial receptions of works such as *Turing's Delirium* and *The Story of my Teeth* in Barcelona and New York because, in vital respects, booksellers, readers, and critics are not dealing with the same texts even if the copyright pages appear to reassure them that they are. The changes transcend the kind of shifts one might expect from or attribute to the process of translation and speak to very active, even aggressive, editorial intervention and reshaping. It is easy to ascer-

tain that *Historia de mis dientes* received lukewarm and sometimes unfavorable reviews in Spanish and rave reviews in English, but not as self-evident that these reviews responded to substantially different versions of the same novel. The same point applies when the Bolivian National Book Award did not vault Paz Soldan to the upper echelons of critical acclaim in the United States, where the most prominent notice, by the travel writer Pico Iyer in *The New York Times*, was ungenerous (Pico 2006). Aside from the quite distinct political and literary preoccupations and tastes of New York, La Paz, Barcelona, or Mexico City, the texts were different to the point of transforming the protagonists and their motivations.

If there is now an American canon of contemporary Latin American fiction distinct from Mexico City's or Barcelona's, the case of *Turing's Delirium* should also encourage scholars to exercise greater nuance in considering the position, widely shared by McOndo writers as they sought to make their breakthrough, that American presses only sought writing on Latin America or by Latin Americans willing to trade on or cater to a broad US audience's stereotypes of the region. Part of the underlying fallacy here is thinking it a matter of authorial, rather than editorial, intention, as in the case of McOndo imagining a previous generation of writers "sold out" to US clichés of Latin America. An editor knows the audience in the target market best, as well as its prejudices, and one can consider whether the editor's interventions seem intended to bypass or reinforce stereotypes. When editing Paz Soldan, if anything, Mueller seems to have been guilty of overcorrection in seeking to resist stereotypes of Latin America as a realm defined by drug use, sexism, and violence, judging by his passing on *Los vivos y los muertos*, and his reshaping of *Turing's Delirium*.

In this regard, Mueller's editing of *Turing's Delirium* is fascinating in two respects.

First, the English text takes out some of the more commercial tie-ins, such as the call outs to *Bright Lights, Big City*. It decenters and de-emphasizes, rather than doubling down on, a young hacker activist narrative reminiscent of *Johnny Mnemonic* and *The Matrix*. Simply put, the original Bolivian publication seemed to hit more commercial notes. Although Mueller may have again sought a campus readership of "serious literary fiction", he did not expect to come anywhere close to the 6,000 copies *The Matter of Desire* had sold. Likely he aimed for a print run of 2,000 or 3,000, closer to the figures of independents like New Directions than of a Big 5 trade press. Thus, he found himself trying to undo some of the more commercial aspects of the original, such as the attempt to channel youth culture, which he felt was too forced, while stressing less trendy themes of older characters belatedly taking political responsibility for decades of complicity with a repressive regime.

Second, it is difficult to rationalize Mueller's excision of subplots featuring what the translator termed "inappropriate desire" as pandering to American stereotypes of Latin America. By any objective measure, in this case he sought to turn down, not up, the dial of sensationalism.[17] Paz Soldan's wider oeuvre makes it clear that he aimed at a critique of these characters and their imperfect loves, but Mueller did not allow his US readers the chance to misread the novel in a more stereotypical manner. This is a key caveat. Much of the Latin American literary fiction that does make it into the American market is making a passage from a more commercial press (like Random House Spain) either to much smaller and less dominant trade imprints in the US market or to small independents that the publishers themselves see as shielded from market considerations – likely *more strictly literary*. Editors such as Mueller or Jonathan Galassi at FSG or Barbara Epler at New Directions are not, then, somehow dumbing down Latin American literary works for the hoi polloi, but rather trying to make sure books make sense to a select, often tiny, audience of dedicated readers of foreign literary fiction. They edit for a thousand readers, or several thousand readers.[18]

Tensions between editor and translator may be inevitable. As a rule, the editor might be expected to serve as a proxy for the reader, and the translator for the author. Friction arises, as Daniel Hahn has noted, "when an editor is essentially pulling a text reader-wards and the translator is pulling it back author-wards". Hahn is a translator of over sixty books who has endowed a prize that recognizes editors alongside translators. He has run workshops in which he aims to get translators to read like editors as they translate, and be sympathetic to "the particular constraints under which those editors work, the business models, the margins, the sales imperatives".[19] Defined in these terms, the editor might be expected to pull a text in the direction of commercial interests, and the translator, back towards the author and the imperative of art.

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17 Here the editor as agent of the American "literary–industrial complex" was not reducing Latin America to stereotypes, and his practice forms a counterpoint to the production of works such as *American Dirt*. See for instance Pérez Curiel (2020).

18 Quite possibly the commissioning editor at a publishing house in Mexico City, Barcelona, or Dallas may sign the odd Latin American author hoping to chase the phenomenon of *American Dirt* or *Narcos*. An editor working with a non-commercial press may still have commercial beats in mind. As likely, though, literary editors of Latin American literature in translation work against American stereotypes of Latin America, as is apparent in what they cut from the texts they sign, as in the case of Mueller and *Turing's Delirium*. Prejudices and the long shadow they throw on the publishing industry cannot be escaped, but the empirical question here is whether the editor is acquiring and editing to serve or disrupt them.

19 Hahn from the main text of his unpublished 2018 MET keynote.

Turing's Delirium demonstrates other possibilities. As in a game of musical chairs, editor, translator and author sometimes attempt to take on each other's roles.

Paz Soldan, editing his own published Spanish text for the American market before handing it over to his translator, thought it best to cut out an early chapter providing a backstory to the government codebreaker's wife Ruth, a historian, because he felt this would slow down the start of the novel. He was trying to speed up a plot that aligns its young hackers Kandinsky and Flavia with *The Matrix* and *Run, Lola, Run*. Here is a case of the author, serving as a proxy for the reader, as an editor of his own work, anticipating the greater impatience of the American reader. Doing so, he accentuates the commercial and mainstream notes already present in the plot of a hacker uprising. He is not shielding his text from the forces of commerce; he is inviting them. This is typical of the writing of McOndo authors in the late 1990s and early 2000s, born of a misplaced confidence in their ability to take the pulse of US popular culture in a way that might interest Americans themselves (see also Fuguet, Fresán). But it seems reductive to interpret this as "selling out" to a US readership. The blow-by-blow of Paz Soldan's exchanges with Mueller and Carter suggests a more nuanced explanation: a misapprehension of the nature of US demand for Latin American writing, a misreading of his likely US reader. And as much as the Bolivian sought to accelerate the pace of his novel in translation, his vision, at least, was hardly a celebration of globalization or the Americanization of Latin America. This was less "selling out" than the folly of editing one's own text for a foreign market, which is in fact the job of the editor in the target market.

Mueller, intervening in the text as a co-author, has a very different reader in mind than the one imagined by Paz Soldan, and certainly not that of middlebrow thrillers dreamt of by the American publishers of Volpi's *In Search of Klingsor*, which had not panned out. The strictly commercial thing to do after the failure of Volpi in the American market would have been to kill *Turing's Delirium*. Mueller opts not to, but still has his reputation to consider in a cutthroat business. His list is his oeuvre. After the underperformance of Paz Soldan's *The Matter of Desire* and generally of McOndo and Crack authors from 2002 to 2004, Mueller had no illusions about profit. All that was left was to salvage a book that would fit his list at Houghton Mifflin. For him the text did not need to be sped up but slowed down. Characters he felt were merely foils to Kandinsky needed upgrades. It would not suffice, for instance, for a character intended as a foil, as the narrator of a chapter, to spout archaic legalese as a sign of his stuffy failure to keep up with the times. He needed a strong motivation. Mueller's suggestions are writerly. As editor, he is a proxy not just for the reader, but for the author and the text's literariness, hoping to better persuade the literati who might pick up the novel that it was worth their time for reasons not of commerce but of prestige.

Mueller's intimation of the crisis in American publishing with regard to the literary midlist and foreign fiction's presence there, which he knew made his own days at Houghton Mifflin numbered, proved a strength as he edited the novel already with an eye for the broader financial crisis that would unfold in 2007 and 2008 but which in publishing was already salient in 2006. In this regard, his editing of Paz Soldan exemplifies what all editors of a translated work for a foreign market need to do: make an original written years before both of its own time and of the present in the target country. The reception of *Turing's Delirium* after its publication in 2006 in the United States would exacerbate the different resonance of the novel a few years after its original publication, to the advantage of the reception of Paz Soldan as a politically attuned author. If the water protests in Cochabamba in 2000 could be seen as a regional phenomenon, and Paz Soldan had emphasized an underground and urban hacktivist youthful strain in *El delirio de Turing*, Mueller's emphasis on making the novel more about the middle-aged members of an elite and their compromises with a regime beholden to the forces of globalization made it more timely in the United States, at least in Latin American studies and the academy, in 2007–2008 and after. If it didn't hit in the broader market, it still burnished Paz Soldan's literary and political credentials.

Lisa Carter, in turn, represents a translator protective not only of the talent of Paz Soldan as her author, but also of her own. Her greatest fear, faced with Mueller's editorial/authorial interventions, is that readers familiar with the original would blame her for what she perceives as a flatter text. After a richly decorated career and sixty books, Daniel Hahn articulates the goal for translators as "not to find our voice, but to lose it". But that might seem a more daunting prospect for the translator seeking to establish their reputation with their first or second literary translation. Carter was convinced the end result of Mueller's changes would be that the absence of a more distinct narrative voice might be blamed on the translator. She felt strongly, given that the Bolivian novelist recognized the transformed text as a "new work", that he should write a foreword explaining it to be an adaptation rather than a translation, lest other novelists "be nervous about having me do their work".[20] She felt her own literary career was on the line.

As Carter's admonition to Paz Soldan should remind us, the problem with comparing English translations to Spanish originals is that it is too easy, and often wrong, to imagine that an author or translator signed off on a change when it might be the editor imposing their own literary preferences or channeling the response of a wider editorial team at a trade or independent press. There are of

20 Lisa Carter email to Paz Soldan, 13 Jun 2005.

course excellent and exacting editors of literary fiction who are not shy about intervening in many Spanish language presses across the world, including Candaya in Barcelona, which publishes only ten volumes a year to allow for five or six edits of a novel.[21] But it is true that for many Latin American fictions landing at an American house, it may be the first time these texts have received such sustained and rigorous editorial attention.[22] This literary editing, rather than defaulting to commercial considerations, or catering to stereotypical assumptions, as likely as not determines what differentiates the English version from the original. We may want to pay more attention to the editors who are the secret sharers of the labor of fiction in translation, whose influence on a text is no less formative than that of the translator or author.

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21 According to novelist and Candaya editor Eduardo Ruiz Sosa, in conversation, Barcelona, 29 Jun 2023.

22 A common fate for foreign fiction imported into Anglophone markets. As Hahn observes, "it not infrequently happens that a book will get substantially more TLC in its translation, and that might be at a significant degree. I've worked on books which have – in translation – lost thousands of words, moved chapters around, excised epilogues".