

02

**UV** Universidad  
Verdad 88

## AND THE EARTH ASKED FOR HELP: SELECTION, TRANSLATION, AND AGUILAR MONSALVE'S LITERARY IDENTITY

### *Y la tierra pidió auxilio: selección, traducción y la identidad literaria de Aguilar Monsalve*

 **Lisa C. Wagner**, Universidad de Louisville (USA)  
(lcwagn01@louisville.edu) (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8276-0342>)

#### Abstract

This article examines *And the Earth Asked for Help* (SK Editorial, 2024), translated by Lisa C. Wagner, as a curated literary construct in which selection functions as a primary mechanism of cultural translation. Moving beyond linguistic equivalence, the study analyzes how thematic emphasis, narrative structure, and sociolinguistic mediation jointly reshape the author's literary identity for an Anglophone readership. The article argues that the anthology privileges narratives characterized by psychological interiority, moral ambiguity, and affective universality — features that enhance translatability and facilitate circulation within global literary markets. A central complication is addressed directly: the critical consensus on Aguilar Monsalve's Spanish-language corpus identifies thematic universality and non-locality as defining features of the original work, meaning that selection amplifies a pre-existing authorial tendency rather than constructing universality from heterogeneous material. Through close readings of four stories, the analysis demonstrates how politically and culturally specific elements are consistently reframed through affective and existential registers. Drawing on Spivak's (1993) concept of rhetoricity, Venuti's (1995) critique of domestication, and Hall's (1997) encoding/decoding model, the article argues that sociolinguistic normalization reinforces this process by attenuating the linguistic specificity of the original. Authored by the anthology's translator, the article brings practitioner knowledge to bear on translatorial practice examined at a critical distance.

#### Resumen

Este artículo examina *And the Earth Asked for Help* (SK Editorial, 2024), traducida por Lisa C. Wagner, como un constructo literario curado en el que la selección funciona como mecanismo primario de traducción cultural. Más allá de los modelos de equivalencia lingüística, el estudio analiza cómo el énfasis temático, la estructura narrativa y la mediación sociolingüística reconfiguran conjuntamente la identidad literaria del autor para un público anglófono. El artículo sostiene que la antología privilegia narrativas caracterizadas por la interioridad psicológica, la ambigüedad moral y la universalidad afectiva — rasgos que potencian la traducibilidad y facilitan la circulación en los mercados literarios globales. Se aborda directamente una complicación central: el consenso crítico sobre el corpus en español de Aguilar Monsalve identifica la universalidad temática y la no-localidad como rasgos definitorios de la obra original, lo que implica que la selección amplifica una tendencia autorial preexistente. A través de lecturas cercanas de cuatro cuentos, el análisis demuestra cómo los elementos política y culturalmente específicos son sistemáticamente reenmarcados mediante registros afectivos y existenciales. Apoyándose en el concepto de retoricidad de Spivak (1993), la crítica de la domesticación de Venuti (1995) y el modelo de codificación/decodificación de Hall (1997), el artículo sostiene que la normalización sociolingüística refuerza este proceso. Escrito por la traductora de la antología, el artículo aporta conocimiento práctico examinado desde una distancia crítica reflexiva.

### Keywords

Translation; cultural identity; Latin American literature; anthologies; literary criticism; sociolinguistics.

### Palabras clave

Traducción; identidad cultural; literatura latinoamericana; antologías; crítica literaria; sociolingüística.

## 1.

### Introduction and Literature Review

Anthologies in translation are often approached as neutral vehicles of literary circulation, their primary function understood as the transfer of texts from one linguistic system to another. This assumption obscures a crucial dimension of translational practice: the act of selection. Before any sentence is translated, a prior decision determines which texts will represent an author, a corpus, or even a national literature in another language. In this sense, translation begins not at the level of language, but at the level of curation. *And the Earth Asked for Help* (Aguilar Monsalve, 2024), a selection of short stories drawn from a broader Spanish-language oeuvre, exemplifies this dynamic. The volume does not simply reproduce an existing corpus for Anglophone readers; it constructs a particular version of the author through the inclusion, arrangement, and framing of specific narratives.

The question of how selection shapes literary identity in translation has received sustained attention across Translation Studies, Comparative Literature, and Latin American literary criticism. Venuti's (1995) foundational critique of the translator's invisibility

establishes that translation is never ideologically neutral: the preference for fluent, domesticated texts in Anglophone publishing systematically effaces linguistic and cultural difference in favor of readability. Subsequent scholarship has extended this insight beyond individual texts to encompass the structural conditions governing literary circulation. Casanova's (2004) account of the world republic of letters demonstrates that prestige and visibility in global literary systems are distributed unevenly, with translation into English functioning as a form of consecration that simultaneously confers recognition and imposes normative expectations. Heilbron and Sapiro (2007) document the asymmetric flows of translation between dominant and peripheral literary cultures, showing how market imperatives shape which texts are selected and how they are positioned for reception. More recently, Sapiro (2016) has argued that the cross-border movement of literary works depends less on intrinsic aesthetic qualities than on the institutional, commercial, and cultural frameworks within which texts circulate.

Within Latin American literary studies specifically, the dynamics of cosmopolitan orientation and global literary participation have been examined in depth. Siskind (2014) traces the long genealogy of what he terms "deseos de mundo" in Latin American literary history, arguing that cosmopolitan writers' deliberate orientation toward universality constitutes a strategic literary practice: "a cosmopolitan attempt to undo the antagonistic structures of a world literary field organized around the notions of cultural difference that Latin American cosmopolitan writers perceive to be the source of their marginality, in order to stake a claim on Literature with a capital L" (p. 6). Locane (2019) extends this analysis by arguing that world literature is not discovered but constructed through the decisions of mediating actors — editors, agents,

translators, scouts — who select what enters international circulation according to criteria that are fundamentally economic before they are literary. As Locane emphasizes, drawing on Helgesson and Vermeulen, “World literature is made, not found” (p. 18 of Chapter 2), and the texts that constitute it bear the traces of the mediation that shaped them for international consumption. These studies converge on a shared insight applicable to the present case: the anthologization and translation of Latin American fiction for Anglophone readers is not a neutral act of cultural transmission but a process of construction in which selection, framing, and linguistic choices jointly determine what version of a literary tradition is made available and to whom.

Luis Aguilar Monsalve was born in Cuenca, Ecuador in 1942 and has spent much of his adult life in the United States, building an academic career at institutions including UCLA, Wabash College, and Hanover College. He began writing fiction under circumstances emblematic of the transnational orientation that defines his work. His narratives are dedicated to “an exploration of the ineffable, the uncountable,” employing techniques that “frustrate an easy, ephemeral reading, negating the possibility of certainty and conformity” (Rogers, 2016, p. 160). Eguiguren de Ponce (2016), drawing on a term coined by Rogers, characterizes this fiction as “neo-cosmopolitan” — oriented not toward local or regional literary traditions but toward universal dimensions of human experience, metafictional complexity, and narrative indeterminacy. That orientation is sustained across more than two decades of publication and confirmed in the most recent critical reception (Báez Meza, 2025; Behr, 2023; Rogers, 2021).

This pre-existing cosmopolitan orientation makes the anthology’s selection logic simultaneously legible and analytically complex. The established body of critical work on Aguilar Monsalve’s Spanish-language fiction confirms that the features this article identifies as conducive to translatability, are in fact, defining characteristics of his authorial identity in the original language. The anthology’s selections do not manufacture universality from heterogeneous material; they amplify and consolidate a tendency already present. The question this article pursues is not whether the anthology misrepresents Aguilar Monsalve, but how it constructs a particular version

of him: more consistent in its universalism, more attenuated in its historical specificity, and more calibrated for readability than the full range of the original corpus suggests.

This article argues that *And the Earth Asked for Help* should be read not as a transparent window onto an existing literary corpus but as a mediated construct in which selection operates as a primary mechanism of cultural translation. Building on Venuti’s (1995) critique of the translator’s invisibility, Hall’s (1997) model of encoding and decoding, and Spivak’s (1993) analysis of the politics of translation, the analysis extends the scope of translational agency to encompass curatorial decisions that precede and structure the act of linguistic transfer.

A methodological note is warranted. The present article is authored by the translator of the anthology under analysis. This dual position — practitioner and analyst — is acknowledged not as a conflict of interest but as a methodological resource. Reflexive practitioner-scholarship in Translation Studies has increasingly recognized that the translator’s insider knowledge of the decisions made during selection and linguistic transfer constitutes a form of evidence unavailable to external observers (Kaindl & Spitzl, 2014; Meylaerts, R., & Marais, K. (Eds.), 2023). The analytical framework applied here serves as a critical lens on the author’s prior practice, aiming to illuminate structural tendencies that operated, in part, beneath the threshold of conscious decision-making during the translation process itself.

## 2. Method

Translation has long been conceptualized as a problem of equivalence between languages. More recent developments in Translation Studies have challenged this limitation by foregrounding the translator’s agency and the socio-cultural conditions shaping

translational practice. Venuti's (1995) critique of the translator's "invisibility" argues that translation is always embedded in asymmetrical power relations between languages and cultures. The dominant tendency within Anglophone publishing is toward "domestication" — producing fluent, transparent texts at the cost of effacing linguistic and cultural difference. This framework can be extended to encompass selection: texts deemed excessively dependent on local knowledge may be excluded in favor of those that appear more readily translatable, constructing a curated corpus already partially conforming to the expectations of the target culture.

Spivak's (1993) analysis of the politics of translation extends this critique by specifying what domestication costs at the level of language itself. Where Venuti focuses on the ideological effects of translatorial invisibility, Spivak identifies the mechanism: the suppression of the rhetoricity of the original — the way rhetoric disrupts logical systematicity within a language, working "in the silence between and around words" to produce meaning that cannot be transferred through semantic equivalence alone (p. 181). When translators prioritize accessibility over rhetoricity, the result is what Spivak terms "translatese": a homogenized literary register in which texts from radically different contexts converge toward a common Anglophone norm (p. 182). The minimal consequence is the loss of "the literarity and textuality and sensuality of the writing" (p. 189). Applied here, Spivak's framework sharpens the analysis of selection and sociolinguistic mediation: the anthology's logic of translatability operates at the level of which stories are chosen and how those stories are rendered.

The sociolinguistic dimension of this process — the attenuation of register at the level of individual lexical and syntactic choices — operates in parallel with the curatorial logic analyzed above. While systematic comparison of the Spanish source texts and their English translations falls outside the scope of the present study and is identified as a priority for future research, the practitioner's knowledge of the translation process confirms that the privileging of readability over rhetoricity is a consistent tendency across the anthology. The translated stories converge toward a standardized literary English that facilitates access for Anglophone readers while reducing the visibility of register variation — the tonal, idiomatic, and syntactic markers that in the Spanish originals

differentiate characters' voices, signal social positioning, and carry culturally specific emotional weight. This normalization reinforces at the linguistic level the selection logic operating at the curatorial level: both processes orient toward the production of a corpus calibrated for maximum cross-cultural accessibility. A corpus-based analysis of specific parallel passages — particularly the ambient speech registers in "And the Earth Asked for Help," the letter-writing voice in "Under the Hummingbird's Spell," the minimization of culturally specific referents in "The Shadow Heirs," and the narrator's retrospective tone in "And Then There Were Three" — remains necessary to substantiate this claim with textual precision, and the author commits to undertaking this analysis at the revision stage.

This expanded understanding of translation aligns with Hall's (1997) model of encoding and decoding. Cultural products are actively encoded within specific frameworks of meaning and decoded by audiences within their own interpretive contexts. The anthology operates as a structured message: its internal coherence, thematic patterns, and generic distribution guide the reader toward certain interpretations while foreclosing others. Translation as a constructive meaning-making operation — rather than transparent content transfer — is further supported by recent work in Translation Studies (Buzelin, 2022; Colina, 2025; Khotimsky, Reents, Stahl-Schwaetzer, and Waters 2024; Steyn, 2022; Tyulenev, 2023; Valdeón & Pérez-González, 2022; Woodstein, 2024). The structural conditions governing whether literary works cross borders — linguistic hierarchies, publisher networks, market positioning — shape which texts are selected and how they are received (Casanova, 2004; Heilbron & Sapiro, 2007; Sapiro, 2016). Locane (2019) emphasizes that the decisions determining which Latin American texts enter international circulation are made by mediating actors whose criteria are fundamentally commercial: "elegir es excluir" — to choose is to exclude — and a literary anthology, like a publisher's international catalog, is the result of a series of exclusions that constitute the corpus of world literature (p. 20 of Chapter 2). The anthology under analysis is itself a product of this system: its selection reflects not only authorial aesthetic identity but the conditions of possibility for Latin American literary circulation in the current phase of cultural globalization.

The study employs three complementary methodological approaches: First, a close reading of the four stories in the anthology, attending to narrative structure, focalization, thematic emphasis, and the management of contextual density. Second, a corpus analysis of the entire selection, identifying recurring patterns that reveal an underlying logic of translatability. Third, reflexive practitioner analysis, in which the translator-analyst draws on insider knowledge of the curatorial and linguistic decisions made during the translation process to illuminate structural tendencies not accessible to external analysis alone (Bermann & Porter, 2014; Jia, J., Afzaal, M., Naqvi, S.B., 2022; Kaindl & Spitzl, 2014; Pym, 2023). Aguilar Monsalve's own critical writing confirms a transnational self-positioning that exceeds national literary boundaries (Aguilar Monsalve, 2020), situating the amplification argument within the author's own authorial orientation.

### 3.

## Results

### 3.1 Patterns of Selection: The Logic of Translatability

A first striking feature of the anthology is the predominance of narratives structured around individual experience rather than collective or systemic frameworks. "Under the Hummingbird's Spell" centers on María Teresa's grief and obsessive letter-writing following the disappearance of her husband, rather than on the institutional mechanisms that might explain his absence. "And Then There Were Three" frames the death of Christian in the Korean War primarily through nostalgic recollection of childhood friendship, with historical context remaining peripheral. In both cases, narrative emphasis falls on affective experience rather than structural causality.

This tendency toward psychological interiority links to a second pattern: the attenuation of contextual density. Even the anthology's most politically explicit narrative, "And the Earth Asked for Help," renders the Gestapo's capture of the Rosenberg family in four compressed sentences while devoting significantly more space to Otto's fantasized schemes of rescue. The ratio of narrative attention inverts the ratio of historical weight: what matters politically is compressed; what matters affectively is elaborated.

A third pattern is the use of allegorical or semi-allegorical structures. "The Shadow Heirs" operates through a labyrinthine bookstore in which books acquire autonomous agency — a symbolic environment that abstracts questions of authorship and literary subjectivity from any specific cultural context. The presence of Molière and Chekhov as reference points situates the narrative within a transnational literary framework accessible without specialized knowledge. This is consistent with what Eguiguren de Ponce (2016) identifies as Aguilar Monsalve's characteristic signature. The "neo-cosmopolitan" orientation — deliberately moving away from regionalism toward transnational literary models (Rogers, 2021) — is an authorial constant confirmed across Aguilar Monsalve's most recent collections (Báez Meza, 2025; Behr, 2023). Closely related is the prominence of moral ambiguity and ethical indeterminacy. Characters confront situations resisting clear moral categorization, and narratives consistently refrain from providing definitive resolution, inviting interpretation across cultural contexts. A further notable feature is the relative absence of densely localized cultural markers. Tarco Carrera (2016) confirms that across Aguilar Monsalve's published collections, he does not address local Ecuadorian or Latin American themes — a characteristic the anthology's selections faithfully reflect.

These patterns collectively point toward a selection logic privileging narrative portability: the capacity to move across cultural boundaries without significant loss of intelligibility or affective impact. This logic does not operate in isolation from the author's own aesthetic orientation. Siskind (2014) has argued that Latin American writers' engagement with cosmopolitan aesthetics constitutes a strategic literary practice rather than a mere byproduct of international exposure — a deliberate positioning within global circuits shaped by what he calls the

“desire for the world”: the cosmopolitan writer’s attempt “to undo the antagonistic structures of a world literary field organized around the notions of cultural difference” in order to claim participation in a universal literary discourse (p. 6). Crucially, Siskind identifies this orientation not as apolitical elitism but as a response to the experience of marginality — a strategic self-representation that opens a cosmopolitan discursive space “where it is possible to imagine a non-nationalistic, non-anthropocentric path to a modernization that is set against the horizon of abstract universality” (p. 7). From this perspective, Aguilar Monsalve’s neo-cosmopolitan orientation — shaped by decades of residence in the United States, by formative contact with Cortázar at UCLA, and by sustained engagement with Borges, Kafka, Beckett, and Faulkner as literary models — is not simply a feature the translator selects for; it is a feature the author has cultivated as the defining orientation of his work. The anthology’s selection logic and the author’s authorial logic are therefore not in tension but are mutually reinforcing: both orient toward a readership capable of engaging with metafictional complexity, existential reflection, and universal affective themes without requiring deep contextual knowledge of Ecuadorian or Latin American literary history.

This mutual reinforcement has consequences for how Aguilar Monsalve’s work enters global literary circulation. Locane (2019) has argued that world literature is fundamentally a construction shaped by the decisions of mediating actors whose criteria respond primarily to the demands of international markets. Drawing on Helgesson and Vermeulen, Locane insists that “World literature is made, not found” (p. 18 of Chapter 2) and that in the texts constituting world literature one can read the “traces of mediation” — the marks left by the chain of editorial decisions that formatted them for international consumption. Applied to the present case, this argument illuminates how the anthology participates in the production of world literature: it is not a transparent reflection of an existing corpus but a formatted product shaped by the conditions of Anglophone literary circulation. The selection consolidates the most universally legible aspects of Aguilar Monsalve’s corpus into a coherent volume optimized for entry into Anglophone literary markets. This is not distortion but strategic amplification — yet amplification has real consequences for representation. What the anthology makes available is intellectually substantial

and aesthetically coherent; what it does not make available is the full heterogeneity of a corpus that, as Tarco Carrera (2016) demonstrates, also includes historically specific, politically grounded narratives that resist easy portability. The selection constructs not a false image of the author but an incomplete one — and incompleteness, when it consistently favors the universally legible over the culturally specific, is itself a form of editorial positioning with representational stakes.

## 3.2 Close Readings

### 3.2.1 “The Shadow Heirs”: Allegory, Canon, and Narrative Portability

“The Shadow Heirs” establishes the anthology’s logic of translatability through allegorical abstraction that minimizes dependence on culturally specific referents. The narrative begins by anchoring itself in a transnational canon — the narrator seeks the complete works of Molière and Chekhov — reducing interpretive distance for an Anglophone audience: “Me interesa adquirir las obras completas de Molière para un amigo y de Chéjov para su esposa,” (Aguilar Monsalve, 2009, p. 252); “I am interested in buying the complete works of Molière for a friend and Chekov’s for his wife,” (Wagner, 2024, p. 7). As the narrative progresses, the bookstore transforms into a labyrinthine subterranean space where books possess agency and must be “trained.” The inversion of the reader-text relationship operates as a metaphor for the transformative power of literature while abstracting that power from any specific cultural context. One of the most striking moments occurs when the narrator is instructed to destroy an “undisciplined” book: on the floor as it burns, he reads the title — *Gulliver’s Travels*: “Rápido, tomé este bastón de láser, protéjase y quémelos...No tuve otra opción sino atacar y derrimbar. Me dolió lo que hice, pero no me dio ninguna alternativa. En el suelo, quemándose pude ver el título *Viajes de Gulliver* de Jonathan Swift,” (Aguilar Monsalve, 2009, p. 257); “I didn’t have a choice but to attack and demolish it. What I did hurt me, but I didn’t have any other option. On the floor, as it burned, I could see the title: *Gulliver’s Travels* by Jonathan Swift,” (Wagner, 2014, p. 12). The allegory extends beyond the immediate narrative to encompass broader questions about literary circulation and control, mirroring at a meta-level the selection process structuring the

anthology itself. The story concludes with the narrator becoming not a reader but a spectator within the unfolding drama of the text — literature as a space to be inhabited rather than a commodity to be consumed: “Lo que no me advirtió era que dejaría de leer los dramas para convertirme en espectador. Frente a mí, Molière actúa con su Compañía de Actores del Rey y, yo, a veces, soy parte del elenco,” (Aguilar Monsalve, 2009, p. 258); “What he didn’t warn me about was that I would stop reading the plays to become a spectator. In front of me, Molière acted with his Royal Acting Company, and I sometimes was part of the cast,” (Wagner, 2024, p. 12). This conceptualization requires no specialized cultural knowledge to be understood and makes the story an effective component of a corpus designed for cross-cultural circulation. The story exemplifies Aguilar Monsalve’s characteristic metafictional signature — the text reflecting on its own conditions of production and reception — in a form that is simultaneously self-referential and universally legible.

### 3.2.2 “And the Earth Asked for Help”: Historical Specificity and the Limits of Translatability

“And the Earth Asked for Help” presents the most direct challenge to the selection logic identified in this analysis. Unlike the other three narratives, it engages historical and political material with unusual explicitness: the antisemitic indoctrination of a German child, the destruction of a Jewish family by the Gestapo, and the machine-gun execution of Jewish children near a ditch. That this story was selected as the volume’s title piece makes its inclusion analytically indispensable. Tarco Carrera (2016) is the only prior critic to have examined it, analyzing the mechanics of Nazi ideology as rendered in the narrative; the present reading focuses on how the story’s formal strategies generate and simultaneously contain its historical charge.

The narrative opens in *medias res* with an antisemitic slur — “The Jewish pigs will die” — rendered as ambient speech in an unspecified European city where swastikas appear on doorways. The setting is historically legible but geographically indeterminate: no country named, no date stated” “Las esvásticas empezaban a aparecer en las puertas de las casas, edificios, negocios y sinagogas,” (Aguilar Monsalve, 2009, p. 184); “The swastikas began to appear on the doorways of homes, buildings, businesses and

synagogues,” (Wagner, 2024, p. 83). What distinguishes the story formally is its dual focalization. The narrative moves symmetrically between Otto and Rubén’s interiorities. Otto “pulled away knowing that his friend would suffer” yet “couldn’t control his expression and hidden guilt when he saw him.” Rubén watches Otto in return — “remembering sorrowfully: why did he have to act like the others?” — and considers approaching him before “a giant hand” holds him back. In his room, Rubén takes out “the only photo he couldn’t let go of” and studies it. This dual structure generates affective universality: the experience of a friendship destroyed by ideological violence, seen from both sides, requires no specialized knowledge to be felt.

The story’s most formally striking moment occurs when the title phrase appears: “A generous and ingenuous image ran through his blood: it was a desperate wish, a deceitful fantasy... in a moment in history when the earth asked for help. (What a rocky road we are going down). Life is full of so many bumps like...” (Wagner, 2024, p. 85). The sentence is not completed. The ellipsis enacts a collapse of narration at the precise moment the earth’s cry for help is named — and at the precise moment Otto falls asleep. The parenthetical intrusion breaks the fictional frame entirely, introducing a narrator’s voice in a register of weary moral exasperation. This metafictional gesture connects the story to the broader signature of Aguilar Monsalve’s work identified across the critical literature (Machín Lucas, 2016; Rogers, 2016). The anthology’s most explicitly political story ends with an affective and intimate gesture — Rubén dying, clutching a photograph of the two friends — rather than a historical or analytical one. The Gestapo, the boxcars, the execution: all are rendered in compressed strokes, rapidly followed by the emblem of friendship: “De pronto el camion se detuvo. Los niños bajaron para caminar un poco, habían pasado cinco horas metidos en el vehículo. Cuando Estaban a una distancia prudente del camion y cerca de una zanja las ametralladoras terminaron con sus vidas. Rubén quedó muerto empuñando un papel doblado. Cualquiera que hubiese podido abrirlo, habría encontrado la fotografía de los dos amigos,” (Aguilar Monsalve, 2009, pp. 186–7); “Suddenly the train stopped. The children got out to walk a bit: they had been in the vehicle for five hours. When they were a safe distance away from the truck and near the ditch, the machine guns ended their lives. Rubén died clutching a folded piece of paper. If anyone had opened it, they would have found

a picture of the two friends," (Wagner, 2024, p. 85). The title phrase performs at the level of the paratext the same operation the story performs internally: a universalized humanitarian appeal that abstracts a specific historical catastrophe into a timeless claim on human conscience: "Pero esto se desarrollaba solo en la mente, era una efigie generosa e ingenua la que corría por su ser, era un deseo desesperado, una fantasía engañosa, un anhelo de justificar al que se estima en un momento de la historia donde la tierra pedía auxilio," (Aguilar Monsalve, 2009, p. 186); "But this only happened in his mind: a generous and ingenuine longing to justify what was valued in a moment in history when the earth asked for help," (Wagner, 2024, p. 85).

### 3.2.3 "Under the Hummingbird's Spell": Disappearance and the Abstraction of the Political

"Under the Hummingbird's Spell" recounts the disappearance of Hugo Núñez, an international analyst working in Ecuador, and the subsequent emotional unraveling of his wife, María Teresa. The story appears to open onto socio-political inquiry — state violence, transnational mobility, institutional opacity — but redirects these possibilities into a framework dominated by affect, memory, and private ritual. The political dimension is present: María Teresa publicly accuses the government and armed forces of involvement, publishing her accusations in named Ecuadorian newspapers, and is jailed for seventeen days. This is the strongest counterevidence to the article's argument and requires direct confrontation. The accusation functions as a turning point in the narrative — yet it is quickly subsumed into the broader uncertainty that defines the story, becoming one unverified hypothesis among many rather than the organizing principle of an investigation: *Había* "...varias hipótesis sobre su desaparición: lo habían visto en Guayaquil con una estadounidense, asimismo en Lima y en Miami. Se afirmaba que había estado en compañía de otras mujeres. También se rumoreaba que el narcotráfico ecuatoriano-colombiano lo había llevado a la region amazónica," (Aguilar Monsalve 2009, p. 230); There were "...various hypotheses about what happened: he had been seen in Guayaquil with an American woman, also in Lima and in Miami. They said he had been in the company of other women. There were also rumors

that the Ecuadorian and Colombian drug cartels had taken him to the Amazon region," (Wagner, 2024, p. 16). The narrative does not suppress the political so much as refuse to prioritize it, distributing it among a field of equally unresolved possibilities.

The narrative's primary investment lies in María Teresa's response to absence: over some 2,300 letters, she constructs a ritual of preservation, each stamped with a small lilac-colored hummingbird. The hummingbird motif operates as a portable emblem of fragile, persistent devotion — pointing to no specific cultural referent, functioning instead as an affective symbol accessible across contexts: "Había coleccionado unas dos mil trescientas cartas en unas trescientos dieciseis atados que envolvía con lazos de variados colores; primero las concebía en una cartilla amarilla y después las pasaba alimpio a un papel blanco impreso con una figura de un pequeño colibri lila con las alas abiertas en la parte izquierda superior," (Aguilar Monsalve, 2009, p. 234); "She had collected some 2300 letters in 316 bundles which she tied up in various colors: first she drafted them on yellow paper and then she wrote out clean copies on white paper, stamped on the upper left with a small lilac hummingbird with open wings," (Wagner, 2024, p. 19). Her retreat from the city to a rural property, her self-sufficient farm life surrounded by named dogs, cows, and flowers, her isolation and accumulation of letters: these constitute the story's real territory, a zone of privatized grief in which political violence is transmuted into personal ritual. The story exemplifies a strategy of affective universalization in which culturally specific phenomena — forced disappearance in Ecuador in the 1980s — are translated into emotionally accessible forms that facilitate integration into diverse interpretive frameworks while consistently subordinating the political to the affective and existential: "Entonces se amistó con el llanto y, como el llanto era suave, cruzaba sin dificultad los nidos ocultos del sueño sin retorno," (Aguilar Monsalve, 2009, p. 23); "Then she made friends with the cries and as the cries were soft, she easily wove them into the hidden nests of dreams," (Wagner, 2024, p. 18).

### 3.2.4 “And Then There Were Three”: Memory and the Universalization of Loss

“And Then There Were Three” foregrounds memory as a structuring device that transforms historically situated experience into a universal narrative of loss. The narrator reconstructs childhood friendships, culminating in the revelation that one friend, Christian, has died in the Korean War. The war appears only as a newspaper headline — there is no description of the conflict, no analysis of its causes, no engagement with its geopolitical significance. History serves as a narrative catalyst, intensifying the central theme without becoming an object of inquiry. Notably, the narrator is Latin American — associated with a fictional Colombian-sounding town and a regional university — while Christian bears an Anglophone surname (Volt) and dies in a war associated with US military involvement. This cross-cultural friendship destroyed by a Cold War conflict carries dimensions of hemispheric and political relationship that the mnemonic frame deliberately leaves undeveloped, universalizing loss in a way that suppresses political geography: “Ha muerto uno de nuestros hijos en combate, su valor ha sido una lección de coraje y entereza. Ya no está entre nosotros el sargento del ejército: Cristian Volt. Es una baja más en esta Guerra de Corea,” (Aguilar Monsalve, 2014, p. 37); “One of our boys has died in combat, his bravery has been a lesson in courage and integrity. No longer with us is Army Sergeant Christian Volt. It is another low point in the Korean War,” (Wagner, 2024, p. 31).

The story’s treatment of friendship reinforces its universalizing tendency. The relationships between the narrator and his friends are depicted as formative yet transient — dissolved not through specific social or economic forces but through the passage of time itself, which becomes the primary agent of change. The figure of Cristian introduces elements of social reality — domestic violence, family instability — that could be developed into broader critique. Instead, these details serve characterization rather than analysis. Cristian’s ultimate significance lies in his absence: his death transforms him into a symbol of lost possibility and irrecoverable time. The narrator’s final response — tears, reflection, renewed attachment to family — completes the movement from memory to loss without historical analysis, reinforcing the anthology’s overall orientation toward accessible affect over contextual depth: “Esperaré a mi mujer y a mis hijas que por el momento son mi única realidad...” (Aguilar Monsalve,

2014, p. 37); “I will wait for my wife and my daughters who are my only hold on reality...” (Wagner, 2024, p. 31). Like the other stories in the collection, “And Then There Were Three” demonstrates that the anthology’s coherence arises not from thematic uniformity alone but from a consistent formal orientation: the subordination of historical and structural specificity to the universal registers of grief, time, and human connection.

## 4. Discussion and conclusions

The patterns identified across the selected stories collectively produce a reconfigured image of the author and, by extension, of the literary tradition from which these texts emerge. The established body of Spanish-language criticism converges on a portrait of a neo-cosmopolitan writer whose fiction was never primarily oriented toward local or regional literary traditions. Tarco Carrera (2016) states directly that Aguilar Monsalve’s stories do not address local Ecuadorian or Latin American themes. Rogers (2016) identifies the defining aspiration of the corpus as the exploration of the ineffable. Medina (2020) situates the work within postmodern modes of representing reality that exceed the parameters of mere mimesis. These critical formulations identify precisely the features this article reads as mechanisms of translatability — and their convergence reflects the author’s deliberate positioning within a transnational literary framework confirmed in his own critical practice (Aguilar Monsalve, 2020) and sustained across his most recent collections (Behr, 2023; Rogers, 2021).

The claim that the translator-curator constructs universality from a heterogeneous corpus must therefore be qualified: what the selection process does is consolidate and amplify a tendency already present, producing a corpus more uniformly oriented toward translatability than the full range of Aguilar Monsalve’s output suggests. This finding advances the

existing scholarship on Aguilar Monsalve, which has consistently noted his neo-cosmopolitan orientation but has not examined the mechanisms through which that orientation is reproduced and intensified in translation. It also contributes to Translation Studies by demonstrating how the selection stage of anthology production functions as an extension of domestication before any linguistic transfer occurs — a dimension of translatorial agency that Venuti's (1995) framework implies but does not fully theorize at the curatorial level. Moreover, the amplification argument refines Siskind's (2014) account of Latin American cosmopolitan desire by showing how that desire operates not only at the level of authorial self-positioning but also at the level of translatorial selection: when a neo-cosmopolitan author's work is anthologized for an Anglophone market, the translator-curator's choices extend and consolidate the author's own strategic orientation, producing a doubly reinforced universalism whose effects on literary representation are more difficult to identify precisely because they align with the author's own intentions.

Within Hall's (1997) encoding/decoding framework, the anthology encodes Aguilar Monsalve's work in ways that anticipate specific modes of reception among its Anglophone target audience. Hall's model insists that encoding is never transparent: the choices made at the point of production — which stories to include, how to order them, which thematic emphases to foreground — actively shape the conditions under which the text can be decoded. The anthology's internal coherence does not merely reflect Aguilar Monsalve's authorial identity; it constructs a particular version of that identity within a framework intelligible to readers whose interpretive conventions have been shaped by a different literary history. The risk Hall's model identifies is that of selective visibility: encoding that reduces interpretive distance simultaneously forecloses certain readings. In the present case, the politically and historically specific dimensions of Aguilar Monsalve's work — most visible in "And the Earth Asked for Help" and "Under the Hummingbird's Spell" — are present but consistently subordinated to the affective and existential registers that facilitate cross-cultural legibility. The anthology's title, drawn from the story most directly engaging historical catastrophe, performs this subordination at the level of the paratext itself: a phrase of broad humanitarian resonance that abstracts the Holocaust into a timeless moral claim.

The concept of the translator's invisibility (Venuti, 1995) acquires a new dimension in this context. In the case of an anthology, invisibility extends beyond linguistic choices to encompass curatorial decisions: the selection of texts, their arrangement, and the implicit framing produced by their juxtaposition all shape the reception of the author's work in ways that are both significant and opaque. The translator acting as curator participates in what Spivak (1993) calls the production of translatese: the smoothing of linguistic and cultural difference into a homogenized register in which texts from radically different contexts begin to resemble one another "in the feel of its prose" (p. 182). Locane's (2019) materialist analysis of world literature production adds a further dimension: the mediating actors who format texts for international circulation — including translator-curators — leave their traces in the product itself, and examining those traces is the most reliable method for understanding the logic governing literary circulation. The present study, undertaken from the reflexive position of the translator-analyst, makes those traces visible in a way that external analysis alone could not achieve.

The present study has several limitations that point toward productive directions for future research. First, the analysis does not include a systematic comparison with the full Spanish-language corpus, which would be necessary to establish with precision the degree to which the anthology's selection diverges from the overall distribution of themes and registers in Aguilar Monsalve's original output. A comparative study would strengthen the amplification argument by providing quantitative as well as qualitative evidence. Second, the sociolinguistic dimension of the analysis currently rests on practitioner knowledge rather than systematic linguistic analysis of parallel source and target texts. A corpus-based comparison of the Spanish originals and their English translations would provide a more rigorous evidentiary basis for the register neutralization claim. Third, the article does not engage with the anthology's reception among Anglophone readers or critics. Future work might examine how the anthology has been reviewed, taught, and cited in Anglophone contexts, and whether readerly experience confirms the accessibility effects the selection logic is argued to produce. Future research might also investigate whether the patterns identified here characterize other anthologies of Ecuadorian or Latin American short fiction in English translation, examining whether the consolidation of neo-cosmopolitan aesthetics

represents a structural tendency in the field rather than a feature of this volume.

The anthology ultimately constructs a reconstituted authorial identity: a version of Aguilar Monsalve tailored for the conditions of reception in the target culture — cosmopolitan, philosophically oriented, metafictionally sophisticated, affectively accessible. This profile is not false to the original. It represents a coherent selection from a larger literary personality whose full range the anthology does not make available. That partiality has implications for the broader field of Latin American literary studies: anthologies like *And the Earth Asked for Help* play a key role in canon formation by selecting and presenting works that come to stand, implicitly, for a larger body of production (Locane, 2019; Siskind, 2014). What emerges from the present analysis is not a verdict on the anthology's representational adequacy, but a more precise account of the mechanisms by which a literature is made to travel — and of what, in the making portable, is left behind.

## References

- Aguilar Monsalve, L. (2009). *Imágenes y otras historias*. Libresa.
- Aguilar Monsalve, L. (2014). *Escombros de humo*. Velásquez & Velásquez.
- Aguilar Monsalve, L. (2020). Cien años de soledad y *Midnight's Children* en una encrucijada de realidades concretas, imaginadas y sobrepuestas. *Pie de Página*, 4, 21–31.
- Aguilar Monsalve, L. (2024). *And the Earth Asked for Help* (L. C. Wagner, Trad.). SK Editorial.
- Báez Meza, M. (2025). Luis Antonio Aguilar Monsalve, *Antología del ensayo breve ecuatoriano actual*. *Kipus: Revista Andina de Letras y Estudios Culturales*, 57, 181–182. <https://doi.org/10.32719/13900102.2025.57.11>
- Behr, H. (2023). Herederos de las sombras, cuentario de Luis Antonio Aguilar Monsalve. *Kipus: Revista Andina de Letras y Estudios Culturales*, 53, 189–191. <https://doi.org/10.32719/13900102.2023.53.13>
- Bermann, S., y Porter, C. (Eds.). (2014). *A companion to translation studies*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Buzelin, H. (2022). The sociology of translation: Theoretical frameworks and empirical approaches. En R. A. Valdeón y L. Pérez-González (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of translation and politics* (pp. 41–57). Routledge.
- Casanova, P. (2004). *The world republic of letters* (M. B. DeBevoise, Trad.). Harvard University Press.
- Colina, S. (2025). The translator. In *Fundamentals of translation* (pp. 245–279). Cambridge University Press.
- Eguiguren de Ponce, P. (2016). Estudio introductorio a la obra de Aguilar Monsalve. En H. Tarco Carrera (Ed.), *Luis Aguilar Monsalve: Acercamiento crítico a su narrativa* (pp. 14–50). TC Editores.
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage.
- Heilbron, J., y Sapiro, G. (2007). Outline for a sociology of translation: Current issues and future prospects. En M. Wolf y A. Fukari (Eds.), *Constructing a sociology of translation* (pp. 93–107). John Benjamins.
- Jia, J., Afzaal, M., Naqvi, S.B. (2022). Myth or reality? Some directions on translation universals in recent corpus-based case studies. *Front. Psychol.* 13:902400. [doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.902400](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.902400)
- Kaindl, K., y Spitzl, K. (Eds.). (2014). *Transfiction: Research into the realities of translation fiction*. John Benjamins.
- Khotimsky, M., Reents, F., Stahl-Schwaetzer, H. and Waters, W. (Eds.). (2024). *Contemporary Translation in Transition: Poems, Theories, Conversations*. Academic Studies Press.
- Locane, J. J. (2019). *De la literatura latinoamericana a la literatura (latinoamericana) mundial: Condiciones materiales, procesos y actores*. De Gruyter.
- Machín Lucas, J. (2016). Irracionalismo y autorreferencialidad en “El atardecer de los leones” de Luis Aguilar Monsalve. En H. Tarco Carrera (Ed.), *Luis Aguilar Monsalve: Acercamiento crítico a su narrativa* (pp. 51–73). TC Editores.
- Medina, M. F. (2016). El deseo narrativo en la ficción de Luis Aguilar Monsalve. En H. Tarco Carrera (Ed.), *Luis Aguilar Monsalve: Acercamiento crítico a su narrativa* (pp. 110–134). TC Editores.
- Medina, M. F. (2020). La imaginación en el espacio urbano de la narrativa de Luis Aguilar-Monsalve. *Kipus: Revista Andina de Letras y Estudios Culturales*, 47, 89–101. <https://doi.org/10.32719/13900102.2020.47.6>
- Meylaerts, R., y Marais, K. (Eds.). (2023). *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Theory and Concepts* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003161448>
- Pym, A. (2023). *Exploring translation theories* (3rd ed.,). Routledge.
- Robinson, Douglas. (2023). *The experimental translator*. Palgrave Studies in Translating and Interpreting. Palgrave.

- Rogers, V. D. (2016). “Más allá de la bruma” y la nueva ficción de Luis Aguilar Monsalve. En H. Tarco Carrera (Ed.), *Luis Aguilar Monsalve: Acercamiento crítico a su narrativa* (pp. 159–166). TC Editores.
- Rogers, V.D. (2021). Reseña: *If Winter Comes: Microrrelatos de Luis Aguilar Monsalve*. *Kipus: Revista Andina de Letras y Estudios Culturales*, 49, 194–196.
- Sapiro, G. (2016). How do literary works cross borders (or not)? *Journal of World Literature*, 1(1), 81–96. <https://doi.org/10.1163/24056480-00101009>
- Siskind, M. (2014). *Cosmopolitan desires: Global modernity and world literature in Latin America*. Northwestern University Press.
- Spivak, G. C. (1993). The politics of translation. En G. C. Spivak, *Outside in the teaching machine* (pp. 179–200). *Routledge.Steyn, J. (Ed.). (2022). Translation: Crafts, Contexts, Consequences*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tarco Carrera, H. (Ed.). (2016). *Luis Aguilar Monsalve: Acercamiento crítico a su narrativa*. TC Editores.
- Tarco Carrera, H. (2016). Nacionalismo e ideología en el relato “Y la tierra pidió auxilio” de Luis Aguilar Monsalve. En H. Tarco Carrera (Ed.), *Luis Aguilar Monsalve: Acercamiento crítico a su narrativa* (pp. 209–221). TC Editores.
- Tyulenev, S. (2023). Translation as meaning negotiator. *Translation Studies*, 16(2), 212–226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781700.2023.2208137>.
- Valdeón, R. A., y Pérez-González, L. (Eds.). (2022). *The Routledge handbook of translation and politics*. Routledge.
- Venuti, L. (1995). *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation*. Routledge.
- Woodstein, B. J. (2024). *Translation theory for literary translators*. Anthem Press.