

BORGES ON TRANSLATION

*It must be visible, or invisible,
Invisible or visible or both.*

– Wallace Stevens

BORGES AFFIRMED, in earnest, that an original can be unfaithful to a translation. He vehemently objected to claims that certain translations he admired are “true to the original” and derided the presuppositions of purists for whom all translations are necessarily deceitful in one way or another. Borges would often protest, with various degrees of irony, against the assumption – ingrained in the Italian adage *traduttore traditore* – that a translator is a traitor to an original. He referred to it alternatively as a superstition or pun. For Borges the Italian expression, unfairly prejudiced in favor of the original, is an erroneous generalization that conflates difference with treachery. The idea that literary translations are inherently inferior to their originals is, for Borges, based on the false assumption that some works of literature must be assumed definitive. But for Borges, no such thing as a definitive work exists, and therefore, a translator’s inevitable transformation of the original is not necessarily to the detriment of the work. Difference, for Borges, is not a sufficient criterion for the superiority of the original.

Those who demand that a translated text be different from the original and yet reproduce the original’s every nuance and detail assume that a work of literature has some sort of religious or legal status, as if a literary work were like the Bible, a sacred text dictated to “copyists by the Holy Spirit.”¹ Those for whom an original work has the status of scripture might assume that the alteration of a single detail of the literary work (such as the numerical value that the kabbalists attribute to every Hebrew letter) is akin to mutilating a binding clause in a legal document. In a sense they would hold the literary translator up to an impossible, misleading standard. A translation cannot be identical to its original and claim to be a translation, and the differences between a translation and its original are not necessarily betrayals. A legal clause is not mutilated when a translator finds appropriate equivalencies for the sake of judicial clarity; and the literary qualities of a work are not mutilated when a translator modifies the original to reproduce artistic effects that would otherwise be lost. For Borges, condemning a literary translation because it is not identical to the original is as unfair as condemning the translation of a contract because its equivalencies are not literary.

A translator rewrites a sequence of words with a different sequence of words. The unavoidable changes that any translation presents vis-à-vis its original are, in and of themselves, insufficient grounds for claiming a translation is either dishonest or inferior to the original. Borges was certain that a translation could enrich or surpass an original and that one of the most fertile of all literary experiences is a comparative survey of the versions of a work. Borges thought of the original as a text produced not by a superior being but by a fallible human, a text laden with possibilities and potentialities, attainments and failures. Borges, for whom a translation “is a variation one is justified in attempting,”² would have few scruples about editing the original as he translated. A good translator, according to him, might choose to treat the original as a good writer treats a draft of a work in progress. In fact, for Borges, the translators of a work may be more beneficial to the work than its author, not because they have a su-

perior literary sense but because their lack of vested interest in the text as it was published makes them more effective as editors: “It is far easier to forgo someone else’s vanities than one’s own.”³ According to Borges translators should be willing to cut, add, and transform for the sake of the work. The process can be as endless in a translation as in the creation of an original. In the preface to his translation of Paul Valéry’s “Le Cimetière marin,” Nestor Ibarra makes a comment that Borges would appreciate: “my translation is infinitely perfectible, since it is the first.”⁴ Ibarra, who appears as a character in Borges’s fictional world, was also one of his first translators into French. In his translations of Borges’s stories and poems Ibarra took many liberties welcomed by his old friend.

Borges, who admired Ibarra’s translation of Paul Valéry more than the original, might endorse the claim that the first translation of a work can be thought of as a starting point for further improvements, but he might add that the potential to ameliorate a draft should not be taken as an argument against publication, because correcting drafts is a never ending process. Borges was fond of quoting Alfonso Reyes, who would say, “We publish because otherwise we would spend our lives going over our drafts.”⁵ That being said, Borges would often make changes to existing published works when they were reprinted. Thanks to Jean Pierre Bernès’s remarkable French Pléiade edition of Borges’s *Œuvre* – the first extensive account of Borges’s transformations of his own works (offering rich bibliographical information indicating the original publication of many works) – we can begin to appreciate the full extent of his revisions.⁶ Just as Borges revised his original works, including the contents of his books, from edition to edition, he also revised some of his own translations when published in new contexts.

The Translatable and Untranslatable

Borges knew it could be difficult to transfer the meaning of each word of an original in translation and did not think it desirable to do so when translating a work of literature (“literal translations are not literary”).⁷ He recognized that in translation some aspects of an original will disappear, but he did not consider those losses necessarily undesirable. He knew that it might be impossible to render a text with the same grammatical qualities, rhythms, and rhymes and that it might be miraculous to find identical meanings, connotations, and associations when one substitutes one word for another. Borges acknowledged the commonplace idea that “a good poem is always untranslatable,” if by *translate* one means to replicate the original, maintaining all characteristics and nuances.⁸ It is also untranslatable if what matters in poetry “is essentially in the intonation, in a certain way of breathing a phrase.”⁹ Borges became increasingly interested, especially after 1960 when he lost his sight, in poetic lines that provoked emotional effects in him, even before he understood their meaning, on account of the connotations and even the arbitrary associations of words. In some cases, as in Quevedo’s famous line “Y su epitafio, la sangrienta luna” (literally, “and his epitaph, the bloody moon”), Borges felt that the power of a poetic line can be impoverished by its immediate context or by interpretation.¹⁰ One of the compensations for his blindness was his memorized anthology of poetic lines, in several languages, which he considered “unique and eternal,” lines which, in or out of context, gave him a joy that had more to do with associations than with meanings,¹¹ for example Gerard Manley Hopkins’s line “Mastering me God, giver of breath and bread.” If translators aim

to convey the approximate sense of that which is untranslatable, their works “are a means and a stimulus to bring the reader close to the original.”¹²

Borges would differentiate between what he called “the language of ideas” and “the language of emotions.” He maintained that in literary translation ideas raise no significant difficulties, while emotions suggested by words raise problems that are almost insurmountable. Certain works, therefore, afford pleasures lost in translation. A writer like Shakespeare cannot be successfully translated into a foreign language, even into modern English, because “in an English that is not Shakespeare’s many things would be lost.” But with regard to the translation of ideas, he could feel deeply affected by a production of *Macbeth* in a horrible translation, with bad actors, and misguided scenery.¹³ Umberto Eco utilizes a similar dichotomy to compare the contributions of Borges to those of Joyce (“the two contemporary authors I have most loved and who most influenced me.”)¹⁴ Eco calls Borges a “delirious archivist” whose own experimentations, as opposed to those of Joyce, take place at the level of ideas, not language. Whereas Joyce treated language as a “jeu de massacre,” Borges played with ideas, “letting words insinuate new and unexpected horizons.”¹⁵ According to Eco, Borges is at his most conservative in his own writing when it comes to the organization of sounds in literature, and at his most experimental when it comes to ideas. Eco’s insight can be applied to Borges’s views on translation, with the caveat that for Borges a text is untranslatable not because it is conventional or experimental at the level of language but because its conjunction of cadences and associations are not transferable. Borges would often compare two literal versions of the same text and argue that the emotion of one was lost in the other: “A cadence is akin to the cipher of an emotion. Two lines may be conceptually identical but not emotionally; intellectually they may be the same, but not emotively.”¹⁶

In his commentary on Salas Subirat’s translation of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, a novel he considered failed, tedious, and chaotic, Borges insists on its moments of “verbal perfection.” At times Borges referred to *Ulysses* as an almost impossible challenge to a translator, by which he meant it would be impossible to render all of Joyce’s verbal experiments into any other language.¹⁷ On other occasions he denied that the novel was untranslatable, recommending that it be used as a pretext for the creation of another work. For Borges some works of literature are more translatable than others, but no work of literature is untranslatable in principle, because a translator can always take the necessary liberties to achieve what any creative writer should strive for: a convincing work of literature. As a reader of literature Borges seeks a hedonistic response that involves either perceptual pleasures, as with his response to Joyce’s language, or mind-enhancing satisfactions, as with his response to a Shakespeare play in a poor translation.¹⁸ Borges was famous for encouraging his students of English literature at the University of Buenos Aires to read what gave them pleasure and to avoid what did not. It is not necessary, however, to scratch too deeply beneath his hedonistic pronouncements – and sometimes not necessary to scratch at all – to notice that his own judgments about the merits of a translation involve an interplay of relativistic and objectivistic criteria that also inform his general views about literature as an art. Borges is a relativist in as much as he delights in the liberties a translator can take in transforming one text into another. But he is an objectivist in as much as he rejects some translations when those liberties do not produce a text that meets his aesthetic standards. As an objectivist Borges was persuaded that the cadences and arbitrary associations of words in certain combinations warrant the claim of “verbal perfection,”

and that some literary works are more successful than others in producing literary effects. As a relativist, he endorsed transformations and misprisions, and did not mind if ideas and other aspects of an original were either eliminated or transformed in translation. His objectivistic and relativistic standards converge in his conviction that original works do not have, in principle, any advantage over translations from the perspective of their literary merits.

Borges does not rule out the unlikely eventuality that a translator might be able to reproduce all the relevant features that characterize a particular work; and at the same time, he recognizes that the most concentrated efforts of a poet, exploiting the unique possibilities of a particular language, may be impossible to translate. However, those linguistic aspects that cannot be reproduced in translation do not cause Borges any more anxiety than the fact that a paraphrase is never identical with its original. In general one paraphrases to underscore certain features of a text while ignoring others, and one generally translates to underscore certain aspects of an original while downplaying others. All the same, an “untranslatable” text remains “translatable” for Borges because it is always “possible to recreate the work, to take the text as a pretext.”¹⁹ Where the cadences of the original are lost, the translator may be able to find new cadences that did not exist in the original. In short, for Borges, the poetry of ideas can always be translated in such a way that the original and the translation amount to the “same” text, and the poetry of emotions can be translated also, as a recreation: “[Poetry] can always be translated as long as the translator forgoes either scientific or philological precision.”²⁰

Ultimately, for Borges, the decision as to whether a text is translatable or untranslatable depends not on theoretical but on practical considerations: on whether a translator is able to recreate the text in such a way that it produces a gratifying literary effect. Borges made many general observations about the practice of translation, but he limited judgment on whether a particular work was translatable or untranslatable to his examination of specific cases:

I believe Benedetto Croce held that a poem is untranslatable, but that it can be recreated in another language. In good logic, it would suffice to have a single well-translated line to refute his assertion. Everything depends on what one means by “well translated.” As for myself, I am a nominalist. I defy abstract affirmations and I prefer to concentrate on particular cases.²¹

Borges agrees with those who claim that “each language has its own possibilities and impossibilities” but does not draw the inference that a translator is doomed to failure.²² On the contrary, he affirms that the differences between languages and modes of expression offer multiple possibilities to a translator whose aim is to recreate the original.

In his insightful commentary on the short story “La busca de Averroes” (“Averroës’ Search”), Marcelo Abadi summarizes Borges’s view that for “a man of letters it is not so terrible to make a mistake in a translation, and it is not so dramatic that there are no strict correspondences between languages.”²³ In fact, for Borges the “mistakes” of a translator or the lack of strict correspondences between languages can favor as much as they can play against any particular translation, or any section of a translation. In the case of poetic lines like those of Quevedo and Hopkins quoted above, it makes no sense for Borges to fault a translator for failing to render what cannot be

rendered. But such moments of literary concentration are rare in the work of any poet, and they are not the sole province of an original. Indeed, a translation may sparkle in passages where the original falls short. Borges would agree with George Steiner's contention that a translation can tap into potentialities unrealized in the original, precisely because the linguistic differences or incompatibilities between two modes of expression may bring forth aspects of the work that would be obscured in the language of the original. In a 1934 essay on the forthcoming English translation of *Don Segundo Sombra* (Argentina's most celebrated novel about the life of the gaucho), Borges indicated that he was able to observe clearly what he had not noticed in the Spanish original, that the Argentine novel is intimately related to Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*: "Going through the English version of *Don Segundo*, I have continually perceived the gravitational pull and the accents of another essential book of our America: Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*."²⁴ Borges says he examined the translation with Adelina del Carril (Güiraldes's widow) in galley proofs. He attributes the English translation of *Don Segundo Sombra* to a collaborative effort between Federico de Onís, a celebrated professor of Hispanic studies, and Waldo Frank, the American essayist and novelist who had friendly relations with Borges' literary circle in Buenos Aires.²⁵ Borges says that Onís produced a version that eliminated the localisms of the text and that Waldo Frank transformed the draft into a work of literature. Borges's account may be a fabrication or a mistake since the translation, which includes a prologue by Waldo Frank, was not signed by Federico de Onís but by his wife Harriet de Onís, the author of many important translations into English from both Spanish and Portuguese, including Borges's story "La escritura del dios" ("The Writing of the God") published in *Labyrinths*. Borges does not indicate whether he assisted those responsible for the English version after reading the proofs, but his observation about the affinities between *Huckleberry Finn* and *Don Segundo Sombra* was taken up by Waldo Frank in his introduction when the novel was published in New York in 1935: "*Don Segundo Sombra* occupies in Argentine letters a place not unrelated to that of *Huckleberry Finn* in ours."²⁶ Years later Borges feigned that the original comparison between the American and the Argentine novels was Waldo Frank's, not his own. He wrote that Frank "established an identical parallelism between *Don Segundo Sombra* and *Huck Finn*."²⁷ Since Borges may have assisted in the translation, one wonders if he discovered the affinities between Mark Twain's novel and Güiraldes's as he was reading the galley proofs, or whether he was responsible for suggesting the connections between them in the first place.²⁸ Be that as it may, the point worth stressing is that for Borges, as for Steiner, a translation can bring to light aspects of a work that may be lost on a reader of an original.²⁹ But Borges would go further than Steiner. As far as he was concerned, a translator can also interpolate his own inventions and excise passages that could have been rendered with ease. A translator can produce an unfaithful work that surpasses the original precisely because it is unfaithful. This is so because a translator can correct mistakes and inconsistencies of a text and edit sections that may obscure an aspect of the work that might be worth foregrounding.

Even if it were possible to do the impossible and produce a translation that captured all the meanings, connotations, and effects of the original, Borges might not prefer it to a translation that modifies it. Even Virgil and Dante, poets Borges greatly admired perhaps more than any others, are susceptible to improvement. Borges was fond of those translators who "thought of Homer as the greatest of poets [but] knew

he was human... and could therefore reshape his words.”³⁰ For Borges, there are no perfect originals, any more than there can be perfect translations or rough drafts. A translator, therefore, should not be faithful to an imperfect text, but to a perfectible work. Why should a translator find equivalents for what Borges has called the “idioticcies of the text” when these may hamper the very effects the text would otherwise produce? Why should a translator forgo those possibilities and potentialities in a text that the author of the original neglected out of carelessness or lack of vision? Borges’s answer to these questions is so unequivocal that he included it verbatim in several of his essays on translation: “To assume that every recombination of elements is necessarily inferior to its original form is to assume that a draft nine is necessarily inferior to draft H – for there can only be drafts. The concept of the ‘definitive text’ corresponds only to religion or exhaustion.”³¹ Borges’s claim that a translation necessarily involves a transformation with regards to the original is hardly controversial, but some may want to draw the line where Borges encourages translators to take liberties and call such work a “loose translation,” an “adaptation,” or an “imitation.” These considerations, however, are not pressing ones for Borges. He was as cavalier with unconventional views regarding a translator’s liberties as he was with plagiarism.

In his general views on literature, the work is more important than the writer: “An artist cares about the perfectibility of the work, and not the fact that it may have originated from himself or from others.”³² It matters little to Borges that his views on translation may be a justification for plagiarism: “If the work improves, why not? Why not make it a collective project?”³³ In *El oro de los tigres* (*The Gold of the Tigers*) Borges observes after recalling, with admiration and even an air of nostalgia, that Spanish poets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries willfully copied texts from Latin poets: “Our concept of plagiarism is, without a doubt, less literary than commercial.”³⁴ In discussing the similarities between Borges’s Haikus and those of the old Japanese masters, María Kodama points out that repetition of certain lines from one poet by another – a common practice in Borges’s own poetry – was not considered an imperfection: “No one thought that repetition was plagiarism, no one thought in terms of personal vanity.”³⁵ Borges was persuaded that the vicissitudes of the translation process can generate literary works to be cherished for their collective, impersonal, ongoing qualities.

Alexander Coleman has suggested that Borges’s bent towards impersonality and anonymity in literature is informed by T. S. Eliot’s famous essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent.”³⁶ Eliot dismisses the need of those literary critics who stress the individuality of a writer as a “prejudice” that should be overcome to see literature as a collective enterprise, where the old speaks through the new and the new reorients the significance of the old: “What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it.”³⁷

Borges admired “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” and his views on translation can be read as a compliment to Eliot’s ideas on the depersonalization of literature. Borges’s own skepticism about individuality or personality in literature informs his notion of a perfectible work, his endorsement of the liberties a translator might take, and his suggestion that contradictory versions of the same work can be equally valid. Borges’s views on translation are also underwritten by a claim, which Harold Bloom has held even more forcefully, that ours is a belated age for the creation of original works of literature.

On many occasions Borges affirmed that after three thousand years of literary

production it is highly unlikely that contemporary writers can generate new or original ideas. There is a sense, therefore, in which translation, in one way or another, is an element of any literary work of the recent past. Borges had highly developed scruples with regards to a translation that impoverishes the work on artistic grounds but no qualms about a translation that transforms a previous translation, provided, of course, that he could approve the results. In fact, Borges rewrote his own translations of the same work, and might have stepped over the line into what some may consider plagiarism. Once, for example, he signed as his own a translation of Chesterton's "The Honour of Israel Gow," which amounts to a corrected version of a previous translation published by his good friend Alfonso Reyes.³⁸

Borges not only maintained that a new translation can be an improvement over a previous one; he also thought that the chronological precedence of an original with respect to a translation is no guarantee of the literary primacy of the original: "I am not one of those who mystically prejudge that every translation is inferior to the original. Many times I have confirmed, or I have been able to suspect, the exact opposite."³⁹ Borges was more impressed by Schopenhauer's translation of Baltazar Gracian's *A Pocket Oracle* than by the original because it avoids the original's fastidious word games that obfuscate "the ideas it proposes."⁴⁰ And he preferred De Quincey's translation of Lessing's *Laocöon* for its superior "urbanity and eloquence."⁴¹ He considered Baudelaire a superior poet to Stefan George but maintained that George was "a far more skillful craftsman."⁴² He therefore was more partial to George's *Blümen des Böse* than he was to the original *Fleurs du mal*. Borges preferred Dante in the original but Cervantes in an English translation. He remembers, perhaps in jest, that *Don Quixote* seemed to him like a "bad translation" the first time he read it in Spanish.⁴³

On the Translation of His Own Works

On the one hand, Borges disapproved of certain German translations of his own works as excessively literal, relying too heavily on the authority of the dictionary ("dictionaries are misleading"). Borges thought lexicons should serve to enliven, rather than dictate, a translator's choices.⁴⁴ On the other hand, he applauded several French and English translations which deviated from his originals. He often insisted that translations resulting from the intelligent or inspired taking of liberties improved his originals. Indeed, some of the freest translations of his own works were written with his collaboration or approval.

Borges collaborated with Norman Thomas di Giovanni in the English translations of at least four books. Di Giovanni reported on the nature of their approach: "We agree that the text should not be approached as a sacred object but as a tool, allowing us, whenever we feel the need, to add or subtract from it, to depart from it, or even, on rare occasions, to improve it."⁴⁵ Carter Wheelock considers that in their translations "Borges and di Giovanni have created a situation as ambiguous and subtle as one of Borges's tales."⁴⁶ Wheelock argues that the translation simplifies Borges's elaborate language of the 1970s and 1950s according to Borges's inclination, in the 1970s, "toward the simple and straightforward."⁴⁷ He also recognizes that the translators decided to take into account that their readership is a much wider audience than the original audience, readers who could ascertain many more of the contextual references, particularly those that pertain to the Argentine context. Wheelock is not disturbed by the losses that these translating procedures entail because, among other rea-

sons, the translations can be thought of as independent versions that will not erase the perception that Borges's originals are "full of involutions and nuances heavily dependent on a particular vocabulary, often shockingly ill-fitting, ambiguous, or otherwise strange."⁴⁸

Others, however, have been more critical. Matthew Howard considers that the collaboration between di Giovanni and Borges has "left a troubling legacy for Borges's readers and critics," in as much as they took many liberties with the originals.⁴⁹ Although Howard, like Wheelock, is willing to consider the translations as an intended self-recreation by Borges and appreciates di Giovanni's attempt to render the Argentine allusions clear to North American readers, his general assessment is fraught with suspicions about the results and even about di Giovanni's literary competence. The translation of Borges's poetry into French by Nestor Ibarra has been equally deplored by some distinguished critics and translators. One of the sharpest rejections of Ibarra's translation is found in an essay in which Albert Bensoussan argues that all the significant translations into French of Borges's main poems, including those by Nestor Ibarra and Roger Callois, are lamentable. He takes issue with Callois's literal translation but is especially disconcerted by Ibarra's work. Bensoussan, a distinguished translator himself, is aware that Borges gave Ibarra full license to translate his poems as he saw fit and knows that Borges wrote a preface with praise and gratitude; and yet, he considers Ibarra's translations to be dishonest transpositions that take unwarranted liberties with the original.⁵⁰

However, Borges, in fact, encouraged Ibarra to take those liberties and collaborated with di Giovanni's transformations of his own works. In each case he considered the end result to be a collective work. In the preface to Ibarra's translation he reiterated his idea that the work takes supremacy over the author and that, in principle, a translation ought not be judged negatively if it deviates from the original. And Borges also regrets that "no one likes to celebrate those pages whose paternity is uncertain. The same goes for translations of poetry. We want to admire the poet, not the translator, and this scruple, or this prejudice, has favored the literal version."⁵¹

The issue at hand is not a simple one. Borges himself argued in favor of literary practices that were collective and impersonal and often expressed skepticism with respect to the individuality of any author, including himself. And yet, Wheelock, Bensoussan, and others have a valid point to make when they express serious reservations in their assessments of translations that transform or mollify the uniqueness or idiosyncrasies of Borges's literary genius, even when the gestures appear to be in the spirit of views that Borges himself held or in terms of the very conceits Borges was fond of practicing. My intention is not to make value judgments about Borges's views on translation – since I am interested in understanding them as they shed light on his practices as a masterful creative translator – but it is important to recognize that the reception of his work, for decades, has faced a dilemma: one can accept Borges's views about the impersonality of literature and thus downplay the significance of his personal genius, or downplay the significance of his literary views in order to appreciate his genius.⁵²

In a seminal work on the reception of Spanish American literature in France (and the international reception of Borges owes much to French interest in his work), Sylvia Molloy castigates Ibarra for presenting Borges to the French public with Borge-sian tactics and procedures that confused unsuspecting readers about Borges's individuality: "If Ibarra was keen on mystifying his reader, he could not have been more

successful... One would have preferred an introduction, perhaps less brilliant, but one which would have given, to the extent possible, a better articulated image of the writer.”⁵³ Molloy seems to suggest that once Borges’s readers recognize the Borge-sian conflation of fiction and fact they can enjoy it, but she also suggests that there is something misleading about the Borge-sian game when it is not clear that it is being played.

But whether or not Borges was a willing accomplice in the mystification of his own works, he would invariably and enthusiastically express his preference for the translations that took liberties with, or corrected, his originals. In this regard, di Giovanni once reported that a university professor complained that a translation of a Borges short story had corrected an inconsistency. The professor would have preferred that the translation conserve the inconsistency, as he considered it a charming Borge-sian touch. As di Giovanni recalled the matter: “Borges was mildly angered; first of all, he found nothing charming in the slip, and, secondly, he feels that he has the right to shape and alter his work as he sees fit. One of the great luxuries of work-ing with Borges is that he’s interested only in making things better and not in defend-ing a text.”⁵⁴

An original text offers a translator opportunities precisely because an equivalent word may have different connotations and arbitrary associations in the language or in the linguistic modalities of the translator. Borges also conjectured that one of the pos-sible advantages of a translation over an original is its likelihood to eschew aspects of a work involving historical or linguistic idiosyncrasies that have little to do with why the work is worth reading in the first place. That is why Borges would at times recom-mend to young writers that they read great works of literature in translation rather than in the original: “It is better to study the classics in translation to appreciate the substantive and to avoid the accidental.”⁵⁵

A translator – like a writer correcting a draft – often cuts, adds, and reorganizes a text to produce a work that improves on rougher sketches. For Borges, therefore, translation from one language to another is a special case of rewriting a draft that does not differ, in principle, from the transformation of a text in the same language, from one dialect or one modality to another. It may be easier, for example, to translate a journalistic article from French into English than to modernize Chaucer or Shake-speare into any modern language, including English.

In Borges’s earliest statement about translations – a short article he published in 1926 – he argued that translation exists fundamentally in two forms, a literal and a periphrastic:

I suppose that there are two types of translation. One involves literality, and the other periphrasis. The first corresponds to the Romantic mind-set, and the second one to the classicists. I would like to reason through this affirmation to diminish its paradoxical air. Classicists are interested in the work of art, but never the artist. They believe in absolute perfection and they seek it. They disdain localisms, rari-ties, and contingencies... Conversely, Romantics never look for the work of art, they look for the man. And the man (as is well known) is not intemporal nor archetypal. He is John Doe, not Bill Smith. He owns a climate, a body, the propen-sity to do this rather than that, or to do nothing at all. He has a present, a past, a future, and even a death that is all his own. Watch out if you touch a single one of the words he ever wrote!⁵⁶

In the retrospective light of his later essays on translation, informed by his views on the impersonality of literature, some critics interpret the two options Borges offers as alternatives to which he gives equal weight. Notwithstanding his ironic tone, however, in 1926 he was more skeptical about the option he attributes to the “classicists.” In the 1920s Borges sometimes maintained that literature was the direct expression of an individuality. This view, which he was soon to abandon, is consistent with the “Romantic” approach to translation, which he seems to favor in this essay: “That reverence of the self, of the irreplaceable human differentiation justifies the literal translation.” And yet, Borges’s preference is not categorical. He recognizes that for texts of the past, it may not be possible to capture the individual who produced them, and to that extent recreations are inevitable. To the extent, however, that the reconstruction of the individual who created the text is no longer possible, translation of ancient works becomes “a game of variants.”

By the 1930s Borges had abandoned the view that literature is strictly autobiographical, and he no longer discussed the problem of translation in terms of classicist or Romantic mind-sets. That being said, the 1926 essay expresses a view about language, inspired by his readings of Novalis, that would have a lasting significance in Borges’s general ideas about both literature and translation. Borges cites a fragment in which the German Romantic poet affirms that words have singular meanings (*eingetümliche Bedeutungen*), connotations (*Nebenbedeutungen*), and arbitrary associations (*willkürlichen Bedeutungen*).⁵⁷ This distinction informed a picture that would remain a constant in Borges’s discussions of language, literature, and translation: that in the passage of time it becomes increasingly difficult to determine the connotations and arbitrary associations of written language that has come down to us from the past.

From the 1930s onward Borges continued to think of language in terms of meanings, connotations, and arbitrary associations. This view determined how he examined the vicissitudes of a text over the course of time: the meanings of words survive while connotations and associations change, even across languages and modes of expressions, because the same words may have different connotations for different language communities separated by space or time. For instance, Borges thought that certain Argentine poetry would be lost on contemporary Chileans because the same words in the same language suggest different meanings in the two contexts. He also believed that the transformations of a language, its accidental developments over time, could either improve or impoverish a work as the connotations and arbitrary associations of words evolve, even as general meanings are maintained. Borges would often indicate that meanings, concepts, and ideas are easier to transfer from one mode of expression to another than are connotations and associations, where emotions play a greater role.

His disdain for translations that supposedly capture the veracity of an original whose theme is foreign or distant also held over from the 1926 essay into future essays on translation. In an idea he expands in his famous essay “El escritor argentino y la tradición” (the Argentine writer and tradition) Borges claims that to capture the “foreign” elements of the original, the translator must necessarily distort: foreign elements are self-evident, require no description in their original context, but when they are explained in a translation, the translation distorts the original. It upsets Borges that the preface of Doctor Madrus’s translation of the *Arabian Nights* includes the indication “literal and complete,” when he believes it resembles the luxuriant style of Oscar Wilde’s *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*. Thus, for example, the original “They arrived at

a column of black stone, in which a man was buried up to his armpits” is transformed by Madrus into “One evening the caravan came to a column of black stone to which a strange being was chained, only half of whose body could be seen, for the other half was buried in the ground.”⁵⁸ Borges likens Madrus’s role as translator to the graphic artist charged with illustrating a novel or short story: the artist includes details not necessarily mentioned in the work. Borges does not object, in principle, to the practice of adding details to a work of literature, but it disturbs him when the claim of “complete veracity” is made of any translation that expands the original to produce effects of strangeness or local color: “The announced purpose of veracity turns the translator into an impostor, since in order to maintain the strangeness of what he is translating, he is obliged to express local color, to make the raw rawer, to turn sweetness into syrup, and to emphasize the lot until it becomes a lie.”⁵⁹

Borges’s insights intriguingly coincide with those of some analytic philosophers who follow Quine by claiming that any given text can have an indefinite number of valid and even contradictory translations. Borges was fond of demonstrating the difficulties of transforming a simple Spanish text into another one. He once offered two different Spanish versions of the first lines of Argentina’s most famous poem, José Hernández’s *Martín Fierro*: “Aquí me pongo a cantar / al compás de la vigüela” (Here I begin to sing / to the rhythm of my guitar). Borges’s first translation is intended to be drawn-out, but literal: “In the very place where I find myself, I am beginning to sing with my guitar.”⁶⁰ His second translation takes a liberty with respect to the original: “Here, with my fraternal guitar, I begin to sing.”⁶¹ Borges compares his two translations, and concludes that the second and less accurate one is the better. The first “so ridiculous, and sluggish! is almost literal.”⁶² Subtle as always, Borges did not mean to reject the literal translation outright, but only the justification of those who might prefer it on the grounds that a writer’s text constitutes his uniqueness.

In the 1920s Borges had already identified the benefits of a translation that takes liberties.⁶³ In the 1930s his views on translation coalesced. He vindicated the right of a translator to swerve away from the original and to interpolate, and he formulated a definition of translation he would continue to restate for decades to come: *translation is a long experimental game of chance played with omissions and emphasis*.⁶⁴ In his incisive definition Borges recognizes that translation involves choice, chance, and experimentation. For Borges, the incommensurability of any two languages, or even two modes of expression within the same language, provides stimulating challenges to the literary translator, who must choose between registering the singularities of an original work and eliminating the details that obscure its general effects. A literal translation can sometimes generate ridiculous results, but it can also spawn strange and wondrous surprises. Borges’s views on translation percolated into his fictions as well. In “La lotería en Babilonia” (“The Lottery in Babylon”), for example, no two books are alike because “the scribes make a secret oath to cut, interpolate, and alter.”⁶⁵ Borges first formulated his definition of translation in a sustained reflection on a famous polemic between Matthew Arnold and Francis E. Newman.

The Arnold-Newman Discussion

In 1856, after many years of work, Francis Newman published his English version of Homer’s *Iliad*. The distinguished professor from the University of London had set out to produce a faithful and literal translation that would capture every linguistic

detail and all of the Homeric peculiarities to such a degree that it would be possible for a contemporary reader to comprehend the Greek world. Once his task was accomplished he announced, with a sense of satisfaction and pride, that his *Iliad* would be the model for any future English translation of classical Greek, excepting, perhaps, the case of Pindar.

It did not take long for the reputation of his *Iliad* to suffer a damaging blow. Bringing to bear his prestige as an Oxford professor and admired poet, Matthew Arnold announced he would offer not one but a series of lectures to demonstrate that Newman's *Iliad* was a dismal failure. Arnold recognized Newman's erudition and his command of Ancient Greek, but argued that a good translation requires an attribute Newman lacked: the literary sensibility of a good poet who knows when to edit and modify anything in the original that may obscure the general effects of a work. Newman's approach might be of some use to a certain kind of reader interested in every detail of a text, but it constitutes a recipe tainted with the odd and uncouth. No translator of Homer can respect every detail of a work if the purpose is to recreate the original so that an English reader of the translation would experience the same effects as a reader of ancient Greek.

According to Arnold, Homer expressed his ideas with clarity; his Greek is plain, direct, and rapid. Newman's translation, on the other hand, is slow, rough, and confusing. Rather than reproducing the general effects of Homer's *Iliad*, Newman's translation registers the considerable linguistic incompatibilities between English and ancient Greek. Newman's literal translation abounds in grammatical constructions that strike any English reader as strange, when it should have flowed with the clarity of Homer's Greek. He rendered sentence structures from the Greek that do not exist in English, when he should have found English equivalents to reproduce the effects of the original.

Homer, for example, uses the double epithet, a common construction of ancient Greek unavailable in standard English usage. For instance, the translation of two consecutive adjectives can produce curious effects in English that are quite commonplace in the original. With this, and many other examples, Arnold concluded that a good translator must sacrifice linguistic fidelity to reproduce the effects of a work.

Newman was hurt and affected by Arnold's lectures. He accused his fellow Hellenist of bad faith and wrote an entire book to acquit himself of the poet's objections. The so-called "strange English constructions," so discordant to Arnold, were inevitable because they reflect Homer's peculiarities. A Homeric translation ought to sound strange to a contemporary reader because ancient Greek is as foreign to an Englishman of the nineteenth century as the ancient world itself. Had he eliminated the peculiarities of ancient Greek, including the double epithets and other constructions Arnold disliked, he would not have captured the essence of Homer. One would be glossing over substantive differences between the world of the ancient Greeks and that of modern England if one's translation of Homer read as if written by a contemporary.

The famous polemic between Newman and Arnold inspired Borges's most important observations about the task of producing a new literary version of a preexistent work. In numerous essays and interviews spanning his lifetime, Borges referred to the Arnold-Newman debate as a beautiful exchange or lively and intelligent discussion.⁶⁶ Most literary critics who have glossed Borges's take on the Arnold-Newman controversy have assumed that the Argentine writer is simply summarizing the views of the two British professors, but that is misleading. When Borges discussed the contro-

versy, he did it selectively. He did not credit Newman's aspiration to offer a window onto the ancient world for a modern reader, nor Arnold's attempt to recreate, in English, the same effects that a contemporary sensitive reader would have experienced with the original. Borges ignores Newman's concerns regarding the reconstruction of the Greek world and focuses on his literal method. He also ignores Arnold's insistence on the effects that an ancient work might have on a contemporary who understands Greek and focuses, instead, on the effects of the work without giving the original any special status, ignoring, in fact, the original altogether. Borges shrewdly side-steps the most serious incompatibilities between the two Hellenists so that their irreconcilable differences appear to involve matters of preference.

In Borges's personal synthesis the two Hellenists represent the two main options available to a translator: either a literal translation that strives to register all the singularities of a work, or a recreation that eliminates the details, obscuring the work's general effects. A bad literal translation can produce curious and even ridiculous effects, and a recreation can be more faithful to an original than a literal translation. This, of course, was Arnold's main objection to Newman's translation. Borges, however, does not assume that the effects of a literal translation are necessarily objectionable, because they can enrich and even revitalize a language: "The paradox is – and of course, 'paradox' means something true that at first appearance is false – that if you are out for strangeness, if you want, let's say to astonish the reader, you can do that by being literal. [Literal translations can create] something that is not in the original."⁶⁷

Borges proclaims that some of the greatest resources available to English speakers came precisely from the unexpected and astonishing effects produced by the approach Arnold objected to in his critique of Newman. Borges accepted Arnold's description of Newman's procedure as the encounter between two distinct modes of expression, but he qualified the negative value judgment: "If Matthew Arnold had looked closely into his Bible [and Arnold had recommended to Newman that one might want to approach the translation of Homer with the model of a biblical translation] he might have seen that the English Bible is full of literal translations and that... the great beauty of the English Bible lies in those literal translations."⁶⁸ Had the powerful biblical phrase "Tower of Strength" been translated according to Arnold's approach it should have produced something akin to the drab "a firm stronghold," and the "Song of songs" would lose its poetry had it been translated more faithfully as "the highest song" or "the best song." Borges corrects Arnold by commenting that "it might be said that literal translations make not only, as Matthew Arnold pointed out, for uncouthness and oddity, but also for strangeness and beauty."⁶⁹

The positions of Arnold and Newman are, of course, mutually exclusive, but Borges found merits in each of them: "Newman favored the literal mode that retains all verbal singularities. Arnold, on the other hand, favored the severe elimination of distracting details. The latter produces sound uniformities, and the former produces unexpected surprises."

Informed by his reflections on Newman and Arnold, Borges developed a doctrine of translation that does not favor a priori the views of one or the other as he characterizes them but, rather, appreciates both as options. In short, he relativizes their views. A translator has to decide whether to cut or alter effects in the original. According to Borges, a translation can take place in a single language, and it is possible to copy a text from one language to another. If whatever one would like to say about the English phrase "the black water" could also be said about the Spanish "el agua negra,"

Borges would say that the Spanish is a copy of the English.

In his famous essay “The Homeric Versions” Borges compares six versions of a passage from the *Odyssey* in his own Spanish “copies.” Eliot Weinberger restores the original English texts in his superb English translation of Borges’s essay. Borges’s procedure and Weinberger’s restoration are both justified. The aspects Borges underscores in his comparisons do not involve linguistic differences between English and Spanish but other considerations, such as the reverential manner of one version, the luxuriant language of another, the lyric tone of one versus the oratorical tone of another, the visual emphasis of one versus the more factual emphasis of another, the spectacular versus the sedate features of another.

A translation, as opposed to a copy, suggests a transformation that may surpass the original. One of Borges’s favorite literary practices was to compare a translation to an original and to judge the translation and the original on equal footing, as two versions of the same work. Borges argued that the ideal arbiter of a translation is the unlikely reader who can resist the almost inevitable prejudice in favor of the original: “If we did not know which was the original and which the translation, we could judge them fairly”⁷⁰ which is to say that the best judge of a translation is the unprejudiced reader. In this spirit he sometimes underscored the benefits of ignoring the original language of repeatedly translated works: “The *Odyssey*, thanks to my opportune ignorance of Greek, is an international bookshelf of works in prose and verse.”⁷¹ Borges expressed his hope “that someday a translation will be considered as something in itself.”⁷²

In his prologue to Nestor Ibarra’s translation of Paul Valéry’s “Le Cimetière marin,” Borges criticizes several lines of the original with the argument Arnold deployed to censure Newman’s literal translation. “Le changement des rives en rumeur” (the changing of riverbanks in rumor), according to Borges, leaves much to be desired when compared to “La pérdida en rumor de la rívera” (the loss of rumor from the riverbank). According to Borges, Ibarra’s line is not superior merely because it sounds better than Valéry’s; it is superior because it supposedly captures, more effectively than its French counterpart, Valéry’s poetic vision: “To insist on the contrary with too much faith is to renege on Valéry’s poetic vision in favor of the temporal individual who formulated it.”⁷³

Borges held that not even San Juan de la Cruz, “the greatest... of Spanish poets,” was beyond improvements.⁷⁴ Borges preferred Roy Campbell’s “When all the house was hushed” over San Juan’s “Estando ya mi casa sosegada” (when my house was at rest): “Here we have the word ‘all,’ which gives a sense of space, of expanse, to the line. And then the gentle English word ‘hushed.’ ‘Hushed’ seems to give us somehow the very music of silence.”⁷⁵ “Music of silence,” to the Spanish reader, is an English translation of San Juan de la Cruz’s stunning paradox “música callada,” which in a more literal translation would be “silent music.” Even as he compared many translations to their originals, Borges insisted that the aesthetic value of a translation does not depend on its relationship to the original. Borges would often recommend the reading of translations, as with Juan de Jauregui’s Spanish version of Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, which are “completely unfaithful and very beautiful.”⁷⁶

A good translation can be unfaithful to the original as with FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyat*, but it can also be more faithful to the “vision” of the work than the original, as Borges insists is the case for Nestor Ibarra’s translation of Paul Valéry. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* offers as its only entry for Borges a comment on a transla-

tion: “The original is unfaithful to the translation.” The context of this quotation is his analysis of Henley’s English translation of William Beckford’s *Vathek*. Borges thinks that the French original is unfaithful to the translation because it was rendered with sloppy haste, whereas the English version was crafted with thoughtful care and attention to detail.⁷⁷

The translations Borges condemned with greatest vehemence are those he called spoiled versions of admirable works. In his indignant review of poet León Felipe’s Spanish version of Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” Borges offers his “copies” of Whitman (which he quotes in Spanish as if they were verses by Whitman) to condemn Felipe’s translation. The following transcribes, in English, a fragment of Borges’s review. In the original all of the quotations appear in Spanish including the Whitman quotation, which Borges presents not as a translation but as an equivalent to the original in order to contrast it to Felipe’s translation, which Borges considers a dismal failure (the original Spanish texts of Borges’s “copy” and of Felipe’s “translation” are both in the endnote):

Whitman writes (“Song of Myself”):

Walt Whitman, a cosmos, from Manhattan the son
Turbulent, carnal, sensual, eating, drinking, engendering...

Felipe “translates” (Canto a mí mismo):

I am Walt Whitman
A Cosmos. Look at me!
The son of Manhattan.
Turbulent, strong, sensual;
I eat, drink, and engenders...

The transformation is notorious; from the psalm-like voice “of Walt Whitman” to the spoiled little cries of an Andalusian deep song.⁷⁸

Borges was especially interested in the destiny of the translation of ancient literature.⁷⁹ In “The Homeric Versions” he observes that the events of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* “survive completely” while the connotations of Homer’s language have been lost: “The present state of [Homer’s] works is like a complex equation that represents the precise relations of unknown quantities. There is no possible greater richness for the translator.”⁸⁰ Borges understands, therefore, why there are so many translations of Homer, “all of them sincere, genuine, and divergent.” To make his point Borges examines a strange Homeric adjective. He offers a few examples including the following: “those rich young men who drink the *black* waters of the Aesepus” (my emphasis). Borges knows that the waters of the River are probably not “black.” Some translators whom Arnold might have praised omitted the adjective. Others defend the inclusion. Alexander Pope believed such adjectives had a liturgical function the translator ought to retain; and Remy de Gourmont thought they must have had an enchantment that has been lost to us. Borges offers another conjecture: “They may have been to the Greeks what prepositions are to us: modest and obligatory sounds that usage requires and upon which no originality may be exercised.” In the sentence regarding the young men who drink the black waters of a river, “black” could correspond to the word “transparent,” Borges might have been amused to note that Samuel Butler’s

translation of the same passage reads, “the limpid waters of the Aesepus,” while Navarro’s celebrated Spanish translation says the exact opposite: “the muddy waters of the Aesepus.”⁸¹

On the Arabian Nights

In one of his many discussions of the *Arabian Nights*, Borges celebrated the chain of translations that brought the stories from “the Hindostan to Persia, from Persia to Arabia, from Arabia to Egypt, growing and multiplying itself.”⁸² After the text was set in the fourteenth Century in Egypt, the copyists supplemented the collection with new stories. Borges applauded the cunning of Antoine Galland who continued the practice by enriching the original with new tales of his own invention (or from oral tradition), such as the stories of Aladdin. Borges also admired Richard Burton for including personal interpolations when he translated the *Arabian Nights*. Borges secretly participated in the process of transforming Arabian stories. He recreated a translation by Galland and invented a story he attributed to Burton.⁸³

Borges’s most sustained and boldest essay on translation is “The Translators of the *Thousand and One Nights*.”⁸⁴ Not only a comparison of the various translators of the *Arabian Nights*, the essay presents a number of his views on translation heretofore not fully articulated. If in other essays Borges maintained that an original and its translations were variations on a theme, no text being a priori superior to any other, in “The Translators” Borges declares that translators often translate against one another. To understand why some translator adopted one approach over another, it might be useful, Borges argues, to know against whom the translator was translating. Harold Bloom has called Borges “a great theorist of poetic influence.”⁸⁵ Bloom’s own doctrine of “the anxiety of influence” has its acknowledged antecedent in ideas Borges first developed in his meditations on translation, years before he wrote his seminal essay “Kafka y sus precursores” (Kafka and his precursors).⁸⁶

In his essay on the *Arabian Nights* Borges also contends that a translator has the option to interpolate passages into a text not in the original. He coins the term “buenas apocrifidades,” which Esther Allen improves with the phrase “fine apocrypha,” to refer to the fortunate additions with which a translator can supplement the original.⁸⁷ As an example, Borges was fond of quoting Chaucer’s translation of the latin phrase “Ars longa, vita brevis” as “the lyf so short, the craft so long to learn.” Borges approves of the transformation: “[Chaucer] gave the line a kind of wistful music not to be found in the original.”⁸⁸

Borges approves not only of small apocryphal changes, but even of major ones and holds that the more successful the apocryphal entry, the more it becomes inexorably linked to our notion of the work. As an example, he offers Galland’s interpolated stories in his eighteen-century translation of the *Arabian Nights*. Borges lists a number of specific examples to make his point that to exclude Galland’s interpolations would now be taken as an amputation of the work, which for contemporary readers should include “the stories of Aladdin; the Forty Thieves; Prince Ahmad and the Fairy Peri-Banu; Abu al-Hassan, the Sleeper and the Walker; the night adventure of Caliph Harun al-Rashid; and the two sisters who envied their younger sister.”⁸⁹

Borges maintained that some interpolations in a translation may leave the content of a work untouched because they are implicit, yet unstated, in the original. He felt, for example, that his short story “El fin” (“The End”) is not so much a continuation of

José Hernández's *Martín Fierro* as an explicit account of a story that can be deduced from the original. Borges insists that other than an incidental character "nothing or almost nothing is my invention."⁹⁰ In the original the gaucho Martín Fierro kills a man and later defeats a vengeful relative of the victim in a verbal duel that diffuses the revenge; in Borges's story the vengeful relative kills Fierro.⁹¹ One of Borges's tours de force, as a translator, is his interpolation of a paragraph in his translation of Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial*.⁹² The protagonist of the story "La memoria de Shakespeare" ("Shakespeare's Memory") argues at length that an interpolation in an eighteenth-century critical edition of an unnamed work by Shakespeare has become an "undeniable part of the canon."⁹³

Some translations become anachronistic as the meaning of words change. Language shifts may work for or against translations, just as they might for original works.⁹⁴ In one of Borges's many reflections on Shakespeare he wonders if some of the bard's images have been improved by the history of the language. He illustrates his point with a quotation about Christ in Israel: "Over whose acres walk'd those blessed feet, / Which, fourteen hundred years ago, were nail'd, / For our advantage, on the bitter cross."⁹⁵ Borges speculates that the word "advantage" ("a word which in a sense is not very beautiful but sounds like the right word") may have had sharper theological connotations in the seventeenth century when it could have meant "salvation." If so, "perhaps the line wasn't as beautiful as it is today. Nowadays, the word advantage comes with a sharp surprise. I am grateful to Shakespeare, but, for all we know, maybe time has bettered the text."⁹⁶

Just as shifts in language can have positive or negative effects on a work or on its translations, so, too, distortions by a translator can have positive or negative effects. Borges prefers Galland's distortion when he translates a tryst between a princess and "one of the lowliest servants" over Richard Burton's distasteful rendering of the same text as "a black cook of loathsome aspect and found with kitchen grease and grime."

Borges thinks it is legitimate to "mutilate" an original if one has good reason to do so. Thus, for example, he considers it fitting to downplay the sexual content of the *Arabian Nights* in order to underscore its magical aspects, but inappropriate to do so to uphold a Puritan worldview. He therefore approves of the discreet ways in which Galland suggests aspects made explicit in the original, as with the euphemism "to receive in her bed" to describe an erotic encounter. He deplores, however, the "convolutions and occultations" of Edward Lane when avoiding the word "hermaphrodite" by replacing it with "mixed species," and when erasing the sexual practices in a harem by replacing a sentence describing a king's conjugal visits with a comment on his impartiality.

If Lane erased the erotic context of the original, which Galland had insinuated into his translation, Richard Burton reinstated them with exaggerated vigor. Borges disapproves of Burton's sexual amplifications in the *Arabian Nights* as a deliberate provocation to attract attention and to establish his reputation as an Arabist conversant with the intimacies of the Orient. In the case of the *Arabian Nights*, Borges urges, the "disinfected" versions are actually a restoration of a primal text. The tales were versions of ancient love stories, not obscene but "impassioned and sad." Borges defends the "disinfected" versions with another argument: "An evasion of the original's erotic opportunities is not an unpardonable sin in the sight of the Lord when the primary aim is to emphasize the atmosphere of magic."⁹⁷ Borges uses the theme of the unintended restoration of an original in his own stories, as when Herman Soergel in "Shake-

spere's Memory" expresses his admiration for Chapman's Homeric translations because they "bring English back – without his realizing it – to its Anglo-Saxon origin (Ursprung)."⁹⁸

Just as a literal translation that transforms the meanings of the original can produce surprises, Borges does not exclude the possible benefits of carelessness that can produce "involuntary good results." Borges contends that Lane achieved this in his translation: "At times [his] lack of sensibility serves him well, for it allows him to include commonplace words in a noble paragraph, with involuntary results. The most rewarding example of such a cooperation of heterogeneous words must be: 'And in this palace is the last information respecting the lords collected in the dust.'"⁹⁹ In a passage prefiguring a major theme of "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" and his essay "Kafka and His Precursors." Borges argues that expectations can play a consequential role in the reception of a translation: "I have sometimes suspected that the radical distinction between poetry and prose lies in the very different expectations of readers: poetry presupposes an intensity that is not tolerated in prose. Something similar happens with Burton's work: it has a preordained prestige with which no other Arabist has ever been able to compete. The attractions of the forbidden are rightfully his."¹⁰⁰ So, too, does the intended audience affect a translation: "[the original audience of the tale was] roguish, prone to exaggeration, illiterate, infinitely suspicious of the present and credulous of remote marvels. [Burton's club of subscribers on the other hand] were the respectable men of the West End, well equipped for disdain and erudition but not for belly laughs or terror."¹⁰¹

Borges prefers a translator who falsifies to a translator who claims to capture the veracity of the original. He admires Doctor Madrus's proliferous translation of the *Arabian Nights* because of its infidelities: "To celebrate Madrus's fidelity is to leave out the soul of Madrus, to ignore Madrus entirely. It is his infidelity, his happy and creative infidelity, that must matter to us."¹⁰² Of all the translations of the *Arabian Nights*, the one Borges dislikes more than any other is Enno Littman's, the one he believes is the most faithful. Borges disapproves of Littman's version because it is the one that least engages with literature. All of the more unfaithful translations Borges prefers "can only be conceived *in the wake of literature*."¹⁰³ To translate in the wake of literature is to enter into a dialogue with resources fashioned by others, as when Burton engages his translation with English literature, or Madrus with the literature of France. According to Borges, Littman's dry accuracy sidesteps literary considerations:

In some way, the almost inexhaustible process of English is adumbrated in Burton – John Donne's hard obscenity, the gigantic vocabularies of Shakespeare and Cyril Tourneur, Swinburne's affinity for the archaic, the crass erudition of the authors of 17th-century chapbooks, the energy and imprecision, the love of tempests and magic. In Madrus's laughing paragraphs, *Salammbô* and *La Fontaine*, the *Mann quin d'osier*, and the *ballets russes* all coexist. In Littmann, who like Washington cannot tell a lie, there is nothing but the probity of Germany. This is so little, so very little. The commerce between Germany and the *Nights* should have produced something more.¹⁰⁴

Nestor Ibarra echoed this idea in one of the prefaces to his translations of Borges: "During that ephemeral possession of a text (and to some degree of an author) which

takes place in the process of translating, we engage much more than our ideas about translation, literature, aesthetics, and almost everything else.”¹⁰⁵ Borges prefers the “contaminated” translations if their approach to literature is worthwhile. Arid as he laments the “uninspired frankness” of Littman’s translation, he wonders what Kafka would have created had he translated the *Arabian Nights*. “What wouldn’t a man do, a Kafka, if he organized and accentuated these games, if he refashioned them according to the German distortion, the *Unheimlichkeit* of Germany?”¹⁰⁶

Borges’s Doctrine of Translation

As with many other topics that engaged him, Borges never wrote a fully elaborated treatise on translation. In his observations about literary matters he was inclined more toward the scrutiny of particular cases than toward theoretical considerations. He preferred the pertinent and sometimes surprising aperçu to the general abstraction. That being said, his views on translation remained fairly constant after the 1930s, and it would be possible to construe an approach, even a doctrine, on the basis of his general observations.¹⁰⁷ Borges wrote several essays in which he outlined the parameters of the practice of literary translation, and offered specific criteria to discuss the results.

The view of translation most akin to his, although Borges did not accept all its implications, is that of Novalis, whose fragments Borges translated on several occasions. In “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote,” the narrator indicates that Menard’s project to produce a text identical to Cervantes’s novel was inspired by “that philological fragment of Novalis... that outlines the theme of a total identification with a given author.”¹⁰⁸ Novalis’s fragment is worth quoting in full: “I show I have understood a writer only when I can act in his spirit, when I, without diminishing his individuality, can translate him and change many things.”¹⁰⁹ Borges shared Novalis’s idea that a translator is allowed to transform the original, but would not hold a translator to the demand that he or she should merge with a writer’s spirit or individuality. Borges’s indifference to those aspects of Novalis’s view is illustrated in “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote,” when Menard considers becoming one with Cervantes and rejects the option as too simple: “[the enterprise is not difficult], it would suffice to be immortal to finish it.”¹¹⁰ Once he rejects the idea of becoming spiritually one with Cervantes, Menard decides to continue with his project of producing a work that would be identical to pages found in *Don Quixote* but to continue as himself, not as Cervantes.

In short, when Borges wrote “Pierre Menard,” he was not interested – as he might have been in the 1920s – in Novalis’s Romantic ideas about the individuality of a poet, but he fully endorsed the view that a translator could reshape and improve an original. Borges also shared Novalis’s view that the beauty of literature, even of poetry, is not necessarily lost in translation. As Kristin Pfefferkorn has indicated: “According to Novalis, if the translator is a conjurer, so too is the poet. And if there is artistry in one, so there is in the other.”¹¹¹ For Novalis, a translator may surpass the original by expressing the idea of the work, or perhaps its ideal, with greater success. Borges did not share the view that the translator was beholden to the spirit of the author, to a specific ideal, or to the essence of the work;¹¹² but he was in full agreement with a notion Novalis expressed in a letter in which he congratulated Schlegel for surpassing Shakespeare in his translations of the plays: “To translate is to produce litera-

ture, just as the writing of one's own work is — and it is more difficult
 the end all lit¹¹³ And even though Novalis himself did not connect his views about translation with his idea that words have meanings, connotations, and arbitrary associations, Borges did. Borges argued that in the meanings, connotations, and associations justice repeated translations of the same work, as well as translations of translations.

In summary, for Borges a translation is not the transfer of a text from one language to another. It is a transformation of a text into another. The appreciation of a literary work, for Borges, can be enhanced avoids the prejudice of as of the work. Judging a translation involves the scrutiny of two or more versions of the same work on equal terms.

One can translate within the same language, and one can copy from one language to another. Borges would call a text a “copy” if the most pertinent observations to be

relevant differ same work. For Borges, a literal translation attempts to maintain original, but changes the emphasis (understood as meanings, connotations, and effects of the work). A “recreation,” on the other hand, omits many details to conserve the emphasis of the work, and it may add maintains both the details and the emphasis that matter in a discussion of a work, most translations, especially prose translations, include some measure of “copying.” A s and effects of the work, whereas an unfaithful translation changes them. A literal translation that changes the emphasis of the work is therefore unfaithful, as opposed to a recreation, which conserves them. of literature than the original when the original fails to fulfill its own potentialities and latencies. A translation is also

it does not contain the same idiosyncrasy not present in the original, when it lacks the verbal oddities of the original, or when an nal. A translator may provide cuts and in- not be un a- tions may actually restore a text to a form that preceded the original at an earlier stage in the original, even if those possibilities transform it.

teria applicable to any work of literature. A literal translation or a recreation, faithful or unfaithful, can sful, depending o

the results of a translation ges did not hesitate to condemn certain translations as dull or inadequate when he felt their e has called such translations “defa work of art even when more faithful than other versions.

process of translation lated work. He thinks, however, rdened by our his s- torical or cir bias is in favor of bracketing those considerations in the hope that translations may attain the same status as original works of literature.

Borges's essays on translation are beginning to receive the attention they deserve – which places them next to those of Walter Benjamin, Ezra Pound, and George Steiner – as among the most vigorous contemporary approaches to the literary version. Borges did not offer strict guidelines for translating, and, as Willis Barnstone has underscored, Borges's favorite word to indicate the choices, judgments, and discriminations of a translator was “preference.”¹¹⁴ That being said, Borges did develop his views on the alternatives available to a translator, and those guidelines amount to a loose methodology for literary translation open to and even encouraging of transformations and modifications.¹¹⁵ He sometimes expressed restraint in modifying an original to avoid hostile reactions, and he also expressed his envy of those translators of classical texts who enjoy the right to transform an original with a freedom not available to a translator of contemporary works. The barriers against transforming a contemporary work are not only legal; they also involve the understandable reservations of readers who prefer a rough approximation to a creative recreation.

Borges's definition of translation as a combination of emphasis and omissions is not isolated from his general views about literature and art: “Time accumulates experiences on the artist, as it does with all men. By force of omissions and emphasis, of memory and forgetfulness, time combines some of those experiences and thus it elaborates the work of art.”¹¹⁶ Borges's idea that the imperfections of memory make imagination possible is a theme of some of his fictions, such as “Funes el memorioso” (“Funes, the Memorioso”). It is also an element he introduced surreptitiously into his own translations. In his version of Kipling's “The Finest Story in the World” Borges includes a passage that tellingly corrects Kipling.

(Kipling)

I had just discovered the entire principle upon which our half-memory falsely called imagination is based.

(Borges)

In that instant I had discovered the principles of the imperfect memory which is called imagination.¹¹⁷

In Kipling's version the frustrations of the writer attempting to approximate the faulty memory of a man unaware he has lived previous lives are expressed in the assertion that a broken memory is “falsely called imagination.” In Borges's version imperfect memory is called imagination, presented not as falsity but as a positive fact one can discover. The positive effects of the imperfect memory have Nietzschean connotations akin to the potentially positive effects of the translation process as practiced by Borges, that is, transformations of originals shaped and reshaped until they gain a life of their own, until the old and the new become variations on a theme.

Notes :

1. Roberto Alifano, “La traducción,” in *Conversaciones con Borges* (Buenos Aires: Torres Aguero, 1994), p. 76.
2. “Mis libros,” *La nación*, April 28, 1985, quoted in Julio Chiappini, *Borges y Kafka* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Zeus, 1991), p. 32.

3. The quotation comes from an essay in which Borges explains why he believes the English translation of *Don Segundo Sombra* is stylistically deficient. See “Don Segundo Sombra en inglés,” in Borges, *Obras, reseñas y traducciones inéditas*, p.
4. Nestor Ibarra in his note to Valéry, in Paul Valéry, *El Cementerio marino de Buenos Aires*: Schillinger, 1931), p.
5. “Publicamos para no pasarnos la vida corrigiendo” (we publish so that we don’t spend our lives correcting) (in Borges and Roberto Alifano, *Borges* [Buenos Aires: Torres Agüero, 1994], p. 220).
 This can gain more information about Borges’s work. Sadly, nothing like it exists in Spanish.
 visible.” Louis di covers that the edition (of over 3,000 copies) is subject to “editorial manipulation.”
7. Borges and Alifano, “La traducción,” in *Conversaciones con Borges* 80.
8. , p.
9. *Macedonio Fernández*, ed. Borges (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Justicia, 1961), p.
 “La entonación, una acentuación muchas veces intraducible” (verse is, among other things, an intonation, an accent).
 “Comedia,” in , in *Obras completas* (Buenos Aires: 3:209).
 See “La poesía,” in *Siete noches* *Obras completas*, 3:259.
11. le contexte de son moment historique. Il y a toutefois, comme le désirait Keats, “des heures qui sont singulières et éternelles” (To find appropriate enjoyment of any work, it is important to situate it in the context of its historical moment. find it, joys that are singular and eternal).
 (in the author’s preface, , ed. Jean Pierre Bernès [Paris: Gallimard, 1993], I X.
12. *Siete noches*, in , 3:208.
 Fernando Sorrentino, , 2^d ed. (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1996), p. 73.
 Umberto Eco, “Between La Mancha and Babel,” 4 (1997): 57.
15. , p.
16. Borges and Osvaldo Ferrari, *Reencuentros inéditos* s: Editorial Trilce, 136.
17. imposible, de traducir. Especialmente al español, como descubrí cuando traduje un fragmento del monólogo de Molly en 1925. Las traducciones en las lenguas hispánicas de [sic] compuestos funcionan mejor en lenguas anglosajonas o germánicas. Y pienso que todas sus obras debieran ser leídas como poesía.”
 This language makes him some -
 late; especially into Spanish, as I discovered when I translated a fragment of English or Romance

- languages have been very poor to date. His compositions work better in Anglo-Saxon or Germanic languages. And I think that all of his works should be read like poetry) (in Seamus Heaney and Richard Kearny, “Jorge Luis Borges: El mundo de la ficción,” *Cuadernos hispánicoamericanos*, no. 564 [June 1997]: 59 [my translation]).
18. For a discussion on possible responsees to art see Peter Kivy, *Philosophies of Arts: An Essay in Differences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 95.
 19. Borges, “El oficio de traducir,” in his *Borges en Sur 1931-1980* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1999), p. 321.
 20. “Traducción,” in Borges, *A/Z*, ed. Antonio Fernández Ferrer (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 1988), p. 264-66.
 21. “Préface à l’édition française,” in *Œuvre poétique : 1925-1965*, tr. Nestor Ibarra (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 8.
 22. Borges and Roberto Alifano, “La traducción,” in *Conversaciones con Borges* (Buenos Aires: Tomás Aguero, 1994), p. 79.
 23. Marcelo Abadi, “Averroes y su trémula esclava pelirroja,” *Variaciones Borges 7* (1999): 176.
 24. “*Don Segundo Sombra* en inglés,” *Revista Multicolor de los Sábados* of the journal *Crítica* (August 11, 1934): 5. The article is reproduced in *Borges: Obras, reseñas y traducciones inéditas*, p. 205. Borges is alluding to Waldo Frank’s *Our America* in this sentence.
 25. Waldo Frank was, according to Emir Rodríguez Monegal, instrumental in the establishment of the journal *Sur* when he came to Argentina for the first time in 1931. Borges collaborated regularly with *Sur*, arguably the most important and influential literary journal in the history of Latin American letters. See Emir Rodríguez Monegal, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography* (New York: Dutton, 1978), p. 235.
 26. Waldo Frank, introduction to *Don Segundo Sombra: Shadows on the Pampas*, by Ricardo Güiraldes, trans. Harriet de Onís (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1935).
 27. “Una vindicación de Mark Twain,” in *Borges en Sur 1931- 1980*, p. 16.
 28. “*Don Segundo Sombra* en inglés,” in *Revista Multicolor de los Sábados* of the journal *Crítica*: 5.
 29. There is also a point of contact between Borges’s views on translation and those of Walter Benjamin. In both cases “each language is open to the connotations and visions articulated in other languages” (Rainer Rochlitz, *The Disenchantment of Art: The Philosophy of Walter Benjamin* [New York: Guilford, 1996, p. 25). That said, where Benjamin’s vision is messianic, Borges’s is ludic, and he therefore is not troubled by willful transformations that may swerve away from the original work as a new work is fashioned.
 30. Borges, *This Craft of Verse*, ed. Calin-Andrei Mihailescu (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 72.
 31. This text appears in his preface to Nestor Ibarra’s translation of Paul Valéry’s “Cimetière marin,” in one of his essays about Joyce’s *Ulysses* and in his seminal essay “Homeric Versions,” in *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (New York: Penguin, 1999).

32. Borges and Osvaldo Ferrari, *En diálogo*, 2 vols. (Buenos Aires, Editorial Sudamericana, 1998), 2:68.
33. *Ibid.* Borges has called plagiarism “one of the forms of tradition” (see André Camp, *Entretien avec Jorge Luis Borges* [Paris: HB Éditions, 1999, p. 24).
34. *El oro de los tigres*, in *Obras completas*, 2:507.
35. María Kodama, “Borges y la literatura japonesa,” *La Torre* 8 (October-December 1988): 677.
36. Borges cited Eliot’s essay to make the point that “[a writer’s] work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future” (“Kafka and His Precursors,” in *Selected Non-Fictions*, p. 365). I thank Alexander Coleman for his observations, in a personal communication, about the significance of T. S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent” on Borges’s general views about literature.
37. “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in *Points of View* (New York: Faber & Faber, 1941), p. 25-26.
38. See chapter 3.
39. Borges, “Nota sobre el Ulises en español,” *Los Anales de Buenos Aires*, January 1946, p. 49.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 3. Borges would have been delighted that an English translation of Gracián’s *Oráculo manual* gained many new readers for Gracián in Spain because of the success of Christopher Maurer’s acclaimed version in his plain and elegant English prose. See Baltasar Gracián, *The Art of Wordly Wisdom: A Pocket Oracle*, trans. Christopher Maurer (New York: Doubleday, 1992).
41. Borges, “Nota sobre el Ulises en español,” p. 3.
42. Borges, *This Craft of Verse*, p. 74.
43. Borges, “An Autobiographical Essay,” in Jaime Alazraki, *Critical Essays on Jorge Luis Borges* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1987), p. 25.
44. *A/Z*, p. 265. In his survey of the German reception of Borges, Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot has pointed out that some of Borges’s translators were too dependent on dictionary definitions, producing a myriad of incoherencies. For example, an “oscuro,” a dark horse, was translated as “obscurity,” “items of silver” as “stolen silver,” and “venality” as “cheap.” See Gutiérrez Girardot, *Jorge Luis Borges: El gusto de ser modesto* (Colombia, Santafé de Bogotá: Panamericana Editorial, 1998), p. 176.
45. Norman Thomas di Giovanni, “At work with Borges,” in *The Cardinal Points of Borges*, ed. Lowell Dunham and Ivar Ivask, p. 69.
46. Carter Wheelock, “Borges’s New Prose,” in *Prose for Borges*, ed. Charles Newman and Mary Kinzie, with Norman Thomas di Giovanni (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 390.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*, p. 391.
49. Matthew Howard, “Stranger than Fiction: The Unlikely Case of Jorge Luis Borges and the Translator Who Helped Bring His Work to America,” *Lingua Franca*, June/July 1997, p. 42.
50. Albert Bensoussan, “Traducir al francés la poesía de Borges,” *Variaciones Borges* 5 (1998): 203-6.
51. “Préface à l’édition française,” *Œuvre poétique : 1925-1965*, p. 7.
52. Borges himself must have felt that tension to some degree when he derided the notion of a literary classic as he worshiped the perfection of poets like Virgil and

- Dante.
53. *La difusión de la literatura hispano americana en Francia au XX^e* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972), p. 205-6.
54. Norman Thomas di Giovanni, in _____, ed. Norman Thomas di Giovanni, Daniel Halpern, and Frank Macshane (Hopewell, N.J.: Ecco, 1994),

Siete conversaciones con Jorge Luis Borges

Textos recobrados -

(Buenos Aires: _____) - The original essay appeared in *Prensa* _____

Jedes Wort hat seine eigentümliche Bedeutung, seine Nebenbedeutungen und durchaus willkürlichen Bedeutungen” (Novalis, _____, ed.

original Novalis also mentions a fourth concept, that of “false meanings” (falsche Bedeutungen), _____ *El idioma de los argentinos* _____ ment by Novalis. This

it. In _____ distinctions in favor of _____ he would relativize in the future.

58. “The Translators of the _____,” in Borges, *Non Fictions* _____.
59. “Las dos maneras de traducir,” p. 258.
60. “En el mismo lugar donde me encuentro, estoy empezando a cantar con _____ *Textos Recobrados: 1919-1929* [Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1997], p. 259).
61. “Aquí en la fraternidad _____” *ibid.*

Borges: Se

Non Fictions _____ Borges’s original “largo sorteo experimental de omisiones y de énfasis” (“Las versiones _____ *Discusión Obras completas* “Sorteo,” which Weinberger translates as a “game of chance,” means a “raffle,” but it also means the ability to overcome an obstacle; and Borges is _____ ings of the word. In Borges’s elegant Spanish the word _____ gests both skillful choice and chance. One could have “largo sorteo” as “a long combinatorial game of chance and skill,” but this rendering would sound more cumbersome than the original Spanish elegant.

65. “La lotería en Babilonia,” in _____, 1:460.
66. See _____ *Selected Non Fictions* _____ *This Craft of Verse* _____ *Borges on Writing* _____ *This Craft of Verse* _____, p. 68.
70. *Ibid.*

Selected Non Fictions

72. Borges, *This Craft of Verse*, p. 73.
 73. Paul Valéry, *El Cementerio marino*, trans. Nestor Ibarra (Buenos Aires: Schillinger), 1931.
 74. Borges, *This Craft of Verse*, p. 60.
 75. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
 76. In *El otro Borges: Entrevistas (1960-1986)*, ed. Fernando Mateo (Buenos Aires: Equis Editores, 1997), p. 100.
 77. See *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 44; and “Sobre el ‘Vathek’ de William Beckford,” in *Otras inquisiciones*, in *Obras completas*, p. 107-10.
 78. Whitman *escribe* (*Song of Myself*, 24.):
Walt Whitman, un cosmos, de Manhattan el hijo,
Turbulento, carnal, sensual, comiendo, bebiendo, engendrando...

Felipe ‘traduce’ (*Canto a mí mismo*, p. 88)
Yo soy Walt Whitman...
Un cosmos. ¡Miradme!
El hijo de Manhattan.
Turbulento, fuerte y sensual;
como bebo y engendro...

La transformación es notoria; de la larga voz sálmica hemos pasado a los engreídos grititos del cante jondo?” (In Borges, “Walt Whitman: Canto a mí mismo, traducido por León Felipe [Editorial Losada, Buenos Aires, 1941]” *Sur* 88 (January 1992): 68-70).

79. Borges would sometimes cite Novalis to make the point that texts that are considered ancient, even if they are not, tend to be read as if they had a greater poetic air.
 80. Borges, “The Homeric Versions,” in *Selected Non-Fictions*, p. 71.
 81. “El agua cenagosa del Esepo.”
 82. Borges, “Prólogo,” in *Las mil y una noches segùn Galland* (Madrid: Siruela, 1985), p. 11.
 83. See chapter 2.
 84. In *Selected Non-Fictions*. The 1935 essay was based on several short pieces Borges had been publishing in literary journals at the time.
 85. Bloom, introduction to *Jorge Luis Borges* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), p. 2.
 86. “Kafka y sus precursores,” in *Otras inquisiciones*, in *Obras completas*, 2:88-90. The essay is translated by Eliot Weinberger as “Kafka and His Precursors,” in *Selected Non-Fictions*, p. 363-65.
 87. The Spanish is in “Los traductores de Las 1001 Noches,” in *Historia de la eternidad*, in *Obras completas*, 1:411; Esther Allen’s English is in “The Translators of the *Thousand and One Nights*,” in *Selected Non-Fictions*, p. 107.
 88. Borges in *Borges on Writing*, p. 105.
 89. “The Translators of the *Thousand and One Nights*,” p. 92.
 90. Borges’s note in *Ficciones*, in *Obras completas*, 1:483.
 91. In Borges’s story the relative defeats Fierro in a knife fight to the death. In his remarkable critical edition of Borges, Jean Pierre Bernès shrewdly identifies the

- sections of José Hernández's poem that would justify Borges's assertion. See Jean Pierre Bernès's note in Borges, *Œuvres complètes*, 1:1595.
92. I am grateful to Professor Jonathan Post for his assessment of the passage in a personal communication.
 93. "La memoria de Shakespeare," in *La memoria de Shakespeare*, in *Obras completas*, 3:393.
 94. The phrase "shifts in the language" is another improvement of Esther Allen's in her translation of the phrase "cambios del idioma," which would translate more literally as "changes in the language" ("The Translators of the *Thousand and One Nights*," p. 93).
 95. Borges is quoting the beginning of Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*, where Henry is planning a crusade against the "pagans" that hold the Holy Land. I thank H. A. Kelly for the reference.
 96. Borges in *Borges on Writing*, p. 159-60.
 97. "The Translators of the *Thousand and One Nights*," p. 96.
 98. "La memoria de Shakespeare," 3:393.
 99. "The Translators of the *Thousand and One Nights*," p. 96.
 100. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
 101. "The Translators of the *Thousand and One Nights*," p. 99-100.
 102. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
 103. Once again Esther Allen improves the Spanish "después de una literatura" with "in the wake of literature" ("The Translators of the *Thousand and One Nights*," p. 108).
 104. *Ibid.*
 105. Nestor Ibarra, *Borges et Borges* (Paris: L'Herne, 1969), p. 159.
 106. Here I prefer my own translation of the original "¿Qué no haría un hombre, un Kafka, que organizara y acentuara esos juegos, que los rehiciera según la deformación alemana, según la Unheimlichkeit de Alemania?" ("Los traductores de Las 1001 Noches," in *Selected Non-Fictions*, p. 413).
 107. Sergio Pastormerlo cautions that Borges does not offer hard and fast rules for translating any particular work of literature and recalls his distrust of literary theory including the theory of translation. See his essay "Borges y la traducción," *Voces* 15 (1994): 13-18. Borges's skepticism about literary theory, however, must be understood in the context of his conviction that a literary experience is preferable to an empty abstraction about literature. In short, it is possible to construe Borges's general views on translation, in as much as he outlines both parameters of the practice and criteria to discuss the results.
 108. "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote," in *Obras completas*, 1:446.
 109. The original reads "Nur dann zeige ich, daß ich einen Schriftsteller verstanden habe, wenn ich in seinem Geiste handeln kann, wenn ich ihn, ohne seine Individualität zu schmälern, übersetzen, und mannigfach verändern kann" (in Novalis, *Dichter über ihre Dichtungen*, vol. 15, ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl [Passau: Heimeran, 1976], p. 189).
 110. "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote," in *Obras completas*, 1:447.
 111. Kristin Pfefferkorn, *Novalis: A Romantic's Theory of Language and Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988, p. 53.
 112. Since Walter Benjamin was interested in notions such as the essence (*das Wesen*) of a work, his views are fundamentally different from Borges's even if they

- might both share the view that translation may give new life to works. See my essay “Walter Benjamin: El Mesianismo y la Traducción,” *Teoría/Crítica* 4. (1997): 135-43.
113. The letter was translated by André Lefevere in *Translating Literature: The German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzweig* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977), p. 65. The German original reads: “Übersetzen ist so gut dichten, als eigne Werke zu stande bringen – und schwerer, seltner. Am Ende ist alle Poësie Übersetzung” (in Novalis, *Dichter über ihre Dichtungen*, p. 182).
 114. Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 265.
 115. Following Suzanne Jill Levine (*The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction* [Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 1991]), Lawrence Venuti is one of the first theorists of translation to give Borges his deserved place in the emerging field of translation studies. See his insightful commentary on Borges’s essay on the *Arabian Nights* in his *Translation Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 13-14..
 116. Borges, in *Obras completas*, 4:310. Borges has also written that “la creación poética, o lo que llamamos creación [poética] es una mezcla de olvido y recuerdo de lo que hemos leído.” (“what we call [poetic] creation is a mixture of forgetting and remembering what we have read”) (in *Borges oral*, in *Obras completas*, 4:170).
 117. “Yo había descubierto en ese instante los principios de la memoria imperfecta que se llama imaginación” (in Borges, *Antología de la literatura fantástica*, ed. Borges, Silvina Ocampo, and Adolfo Bioy Casares [Barcelona: Edhasa, 1981], p. 263. Ocampo and Bioy Casares may have collaborated on this translation).

Reference: *Invisible Work. Borges and Translation*, Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 2002, p. 1-35