

Borges Reads Joyce The Role of Translation in the Creation of Texts

Introduction

There is perhaps no other writer for whom the act of reading is as intimately connected to that of writing as it is for Borges. His texts constantly blur and contaminate the distinctions between writer, reader, and text. By extension, whom Borges chooses to read and how is always relevant to what Borges writes. With this idea in mind, I analyze the role translation plays in the creation of new texts by looking at how Borges reads Joyce. What does Borges' dialogue with Joyce tell us about the relationships between translation, influence, reading, and writing?

I begin with what I call the first point of contact between these two writers, a 1925 article by Borges about *Ulysses* which includes a translation of the last page of Joyce's novel. Using Borges' own theories as a frame, I analyze this translation to see how Borges puts his ideas into practice, and how translation can function as a metaphor for writing. In both theory and practice, Borges establishes that there is no reason to believe that a translation is inferior to the original, problematizes issues of "authority," "originality," and "fidelity," and negates the concept of a "definitive text." I also consider several other places where Borges dialogues with Joyce, especially an unexpected intersection between Funes and Joyce. I conclude with a discussion of how Borges utilizes Joyce (as a precursor, one might say), and of the possibilities and limits (if any) of translation.

1. First Contact

In the January, 1925 issue of *Proa*, calling himself the first "aventurero hispánico" to arrive to Joyce's book *Ulysses*, Borges provides a brief

commentary on the book followed by a translation of its last page¹. In spite of its brevity (or perhaps: with characteristic brevity), the article manages to introduce Joyce to Argentine readers and to make a number of insightful comments about *Ulysses*—which also turn out to be telling about Borges himself—in the space of four quick pages before going on to the by-now celebrated translation of the last page of *Ulysses*. The translation becomes part of Borges' reading of Joyce, and the decisions that Borges makes in it are interesting in how they illustrate Borges' theories about translation. I will examine the translation below.

A few words first about the article, entitled "El *Ulises* de Joyce." Borges starts out in a humble tone (which should raise the first warning sign for us, as Borges' "humility" can almost never be read literally, but should be seen rather as a rhetorical tool), stating that he will not attempt to describe the entirety of the text. He leaves such a description, instead, to Valéry Larbaud, who has already done so, as Borges informs us, in issue 18 of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*². Borges also makes another disclaimer of sorts about *Ulysses*, as he confesses not to have "desbrozado las setecientas páginas que lo integran." However, he adds that he knows the text with an "...aventurera y legítima certidumbre que hay en nosotros, al afirmar nuestro conocimiento de la ciudad, sin adjudicarnos por ello la intimidad de cuantas calles incluye ni aun de todos sus barrios" (3). This latter comment claims an affinity regarding the importance of the role of the city in both writers; it presents the idea of the geography of a text, a concept both writers explored throughout their works. This is especially evident in Borges' poetry of the time, in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, *Luna de enfrente*, and *Cuaderno San Martín*, which all contain the careful working of the text as a map of the city. As Jorge Schwartz says about *Fervor* and Joyce: "Tanto Dublin quanto Buenos Aires são ficcionalmente construídas como centros geo-

¹ The commentary part of the article, without the translation, is then included in *Inquisiciones*. I should mention that Borges indeed appears to be the first Hispanic "adventurer," or at least the first Argentine, to tackle *Ulysses*. A survey of key journals of the time in Argentina (including *Martín Fierro*, *Nosotros*, *Síntesis*, and *Caras y Caretas*, as well as earlier numbers of *Proa*) reveals only one previous mention of Joyce, in the May, 1922 issue of *Nosotros*. It is a brief, unsigned note, entitled "James Joyce," containing biographical information about the writer, announcing the publication of *Ulysses*, and advising that a potential reader would need to "ser dueño de considerable cultura clásica" to be able to understand it.

² I note, in passing, the importance of a connection to Larbaud in introducing Joyce and other avant-garde writers of the period to Argentine writers. This topic is studied by Alberto Blasi in *Güiraldes y Larbaud: Una amistad creadora*.

gráficos de arquitectura labiríntica” (“Borges e Joyce” 143). The affinity does not end with Borges’ early poetry, however, but also extends to many of Borges’ fictions, where the role of the labyrinthine city (either as a literal or a figurative one) is often crucial.

The other comment, about not having read all seven hundred pages of *Ulysses*, expresses a sentiment that Borges would repeat, in one form or another, either humorously, like here, or in more hostile terms, throughout his life. I will come back to what these kind of comments suggest about the relationship between Borges and Joyce in section 5 of this paper.

After this introduction, the essay reveals the extent to which Borges understood the depth and value of the most important facets of *Ulysses*. Borges discusses subjectivity and perspective in *Ulysses*, Joyce’s study of human consciousness with relation to concepts of time, and the conception of reality in the text (4-5). Borges also intersperses an ironic sense of humor throughout his analysis, which, as in the following example, serves to undermine the verisimilitude of Borges’ “humble” stance at the beginning of the article:

Si Shakespear [sic]—según su propia metáfora—puso en la vuelta de un reloj de arena las proezas de los años, Joyce invierte el procedimiento y despliega la única jornada de su héroe sobre muchas jornadas de lector. (No he dicho muchas siestas.) (5)

The point of these asides is that even as he praises Joyce, Borges throws in underhanded barbs, demonstrating his own humor and wit, and very appropriately so in dealing with a writer like Joyce, for whom humor and wit were basic staples. By the time we get to Borges’ final comments about the styles and languages in *Ulysses*, it gets more and more difficult to believe that we are dealing with someone who did not make it all the way through the seven hundred pages of the book, as Borges stated earlier.

Borges’ insights into *Ulysses* come at a very early date. His article is early not just for Argentina and Latin America, but for the world in general. It shows Borges at the “avant-garde” of Joycean reception, four years before the publication of the French translation of *Ulysses*. And a remark he makes about the need for having to wait for commentaries and guides in order to be able to enjoy it also anticipates Gilbert’s 1931 study, *James Joyce’s Ulysses, A Study*. Thus, well ahead of his time in Argentina, and, arguably, internationally, Borges realizes not only the importance of Joyce’s work, but also provides an insightful reading of Joyce’s project based on what is perhaps just a partial read of *Ulys-*

ses. The same is true of his article about neologisms in *Finnegans Wake* ("Joyce y los neologismos"), which appeared immediately after the publication of the *Wake*, in *Sur* in November, 1939.

2. *Borges on Translation*

What really makes Borges' first article about Joyce extraordinary is that it is followed by his brilliant translation of the last page of *Ulysses*. As I look at some of the solutions Borges finds for this translation, and analyze a few of the decisions he makes, I want to keep in mind Borges' own ideas about translation, as presented in his two most important essays on the topic, "Las versiones homéricas" (*Discusión*, 1932) and "Los traductores de las *1001 Noches*" (*Historia de la eternidad*, 1936), as well as Borges' critique of Salas Subirat's 1945 translation of *Ulysses* (*Los Anales de Buenos Aires*, January, 1946)³.

Borges examines a number of translations of Homer (in "Las versiones homéricas") and the *Arabian Nights* (in "Los traductores de las *1001 Noches*") as he argues that there is no reason to believe that a translation need be inferior to the original. The memorable passage that sums up this idea, found in the first of these essays, is:

Presuponer que toda recombinación de elementos es obligatoriamente inferior a su original, es presuponer que el borrador 9 es obligatoriamente inferior al borrador H—ya que no puede haber sino borradores. El concepto de *texto definitivo* no corresponde sino a la religión o al cansancio. (*OC* 1: 239; italics in the original.)

In Borges' 1946 critique of Salas Subirat's translation of *Ulysses*, he repeats this statement almost word for word, and, applying it to the text he is reviewing, adds the following: "Joyce dilata y reforma el idioma inglés; su traductor tiene el deber de ensayar libertades congéneres" ("Nota sobre..." 49). As Jorge Schwartz has said, these ideas imply that, "La posibilidad que una traducción tiene de superar al original, coloca al traductor en posición de verdadero recreador." Borges establishes the concept of a "traductor-recreador"; he sees the text as "un objeto provisorio, posible de una continua re-escritura." From these statements, I agree with Schwartz in concluding that, for Borges, "el texto definitivo constituye una falacia" ("Borges y la primera..." 722).

³ Borges has two other essays related to translation, which I will not be utilizing here, both from *Otras Inquisiciones*: "Sobre el *Vathek* de William Beckford" and "El enigma de Edward Fitzgerald."

This conclusion is especially relevant not just because of what it reveals about Borges, but also as it applies to Joyce. It may be argued that the fallacy of a definitive text is one of the strongest affinities between these two very different writers. Although I do not wish to stray too far from the focus of this paper, it is worthwhile to note that Borges' comments about the possibility or impossibility of translating Joyce's work are very closely related to what would later be the development of notions such as "intertextuality," as well as issues of "authority" and "originality," in post-structuralist theory. As Fiddian argues, it is necessary to keep in mind the notion of "intertextuality" (even and especially as it was shaped by Borges and Joyce) in any comparative study of the influences of Joyce's work on Latin American writers ("James Joyce and Spanish..." 27-28). I would also argue that what is at stake here are the basic tenets of literature, of influence and tradition, and that Borges is making translation a metaphor for the process of reading and writing. Let me recall the first line of "Las versiones homéricas": "Ningún problema tan consustancial con las letras y con su modesto misterio como el que propone una traducción" (*OC* 1: 239).

Joyce, for his part, is clearly a multilingual writer; this is evident in *Ulysses*, as well as in *Finnegans Wake*, although in a very different fashion. The question of translation *in* Joyce's work is itself worthy of its own study. In looking at translations *of* Joyce's work, one can find new readings of his texts⁴. In this sense, too, the translation of Joyce's work, and the topic of translation in it, becomes important in determining how to speak of literary influence. The very fact that he titles his novel *Ulysses*, for example, already highlights the fact that the process of translation is at work in the process of writing and influence: "Ulysses," not "Odysseus," to indicate that there is already one major translation / version of the story (from Greek to Latin), and that he is now presenting another one, in the form of a modern analogue (perhaps from Latin, and through the entire European tradition since then).

In any case, the other point from Borges' two essays on translation that I want to keep in mind here has to do with the reference he makes in both to the Newman-Arnold debates. Summarizing, Borges tells us that Newman and Arnold take the two possible opposite positions on translation: Newman represents the belief that a translation should be literal, whereas Arnold that the translation should eliminate any details that distract or interrupt the text. Borges considers both valid, capable

⁴ Fritz Senn studies this topic in *Joyce's Dislocations: Essays on Reading as Translation*.

of providing “agrados,” but also states that a literal translation can never be faithful to the original, as it claims to be. At end of “Las versiones homéricas,” Borges concludes that Butler’s version, which is the least literal of them all, might just be the most loyal (*OC* 1: 243).

Does this suggest that Borges prefers Arnold’s stance? Perhaps. But the issue is further complicated by the fact that the very concept of fidelity is problematized in these essays. For what does fidelity mean when we realize that there is no “definitive text,” and that every translation, every text, is a re-writing of—a dialoging with—a previous version?

In “Los traductores de las *1001 Noches*,” Borges adds:

Ambas [conductas, la de Newman y la de Arnold] son menos importantes que el traductor y que sus hábitos literarios. Traducir el espíritu es una intención tan enorme y tan fantasmal que bien puede quedar como inofensiva; traducir la letra, una precisión tan extravagante que no hay riesgo de que la ensayen. Más grave que esos infinitos propósitos es la conservación o supresión de ciertos pormenores; más grave que esas preferencias y olvidos, es el movimiento sintáctico. (*OC* 1: 400)

Borges appears to be saying that neither approach, exclusively, is feasible; that both are impossible if taken to their extremes. Instead, the emphasis is on the literary habits of the translator, on the way he/she is able to manipulate the language, the “movimiento sintáctico.” In this same essay, Borges valorizes a series of preferences, omissions, alterations, and additions—of creative infidelities—in Burton’s and Mardrus’ versions of the *Nights*. Speaking of Mardrus, he says: “Su infidelidad, *su infidelidad creadora y feliz*, es lo que nos debe importar” (*OC* 1: 410; my italics.).

3. The Translation

Keeping all this in mind, I turn now to Borges’ translation of the last page of *Ulysses*, to see if Borges leans toward either the Newman or the Arnold solution, and what his “hábitos literarios” may be. Jorge Schwartz has made a couple of important studies of this translation, in which he compares it with Salas Subirat’s version of the 1945 Spanish translation, as well as with two Portuguese translations, by Antônio Houaiss and Haroldo de Campos. As Schwartz argues, Borges’ translation is much less literal than Salas Subirat’s, especially in situations where a literal translation would miss the idiomatic meaning of the original. Through an analysis of the translations, Schwartz shows how

Borges, in comparison with Salas Subirat, “aprieta y torna el lenguaje más coloquial—siendo este último un rasgo esencial para el tipo de discurso en cuestión: el monólogo interiorizado de Molly Bloom (corriente de la conciencia)” (“Borges y la primera...” 723); how he manages to avoid literal translation for poetic language and for local idiomatic expressions; and how he avoids artificial solutions that fall outside the style of the original language (such as using literary written expressions to translate dialogued language).

Thus, Borges finds ways to translate the orality of Molly’s monologue, as well as the many colloquial and idiomatic expressions she utilizes. He has a wonderful knack for translating literally when it helps to capture Molly’s personal idiosyncratic modalities, and to translate freely the expressions that are already built into the language, and that Molly herself incorporates into her monologue unconsciously. An example of the former is, “pinky sugar,” which Borges translates as “azúcar rosadita”; or “my mountain flower,” which Borges translates as “mi flor serrana.” The latter situation, however, is much more difficult, and arises time and again, even in this small fragment. Here are some example of idiomatic expressions that Borges translates into a very colloquial and appropriate Spanish that fits into the flow of the monologue:

<i>Joyce</i>	<i>Borges</i>
I love flowers I'd love to have the whole place swimming in roses	soy loca por las flores yo tendría nadando en rosas toda la casa
that would do your heart good to see rivers and lakes and flowers all sorts of shapes and smells and colors	te alegraría el corazón ver ríos y bañados y flores con cuanta forma Dios creó y olores y colores
wouldnt give a snap of my two fingers	me importa un pito
and why why	y a qué santos
so there you are	están embromados

Then an example of where Borges actually manages to translate an idiomatic expression in English into a poetic one in Spanish that does not feel forced, as in the first part of:

<i>Joyce</i>	<i>Borges</i>
they might as well try to stop the sun from rising tomorrow	eso es como atajarlo al sol de salir

In this last case, Borges also displaces the alliteration in *s* (“sol de salir”) which in the English version comes in conjunction with the next phrase, “the sun shines for you he said.”

Borges is also not reluctant to make variations or omissions, as he finds necessary. For example, as Schwartz points out, he omits all proper names and references to previous characters in *Ulysses* that someone reading just this fragment would not understand. These kinds of omissions represent a recontextualizing that makes the fragment function better as an autonomous piece, allowing it to exist on its own, as a (co-) creation of the translator’s. Some of the slight alterations are also wonderful in how they fit in with the overall tone and register of the internal monologue. In the following example, I believe Borges’ version is shorter but perhaps more elegant than Joyce’s:

<i>Joyce</i>	<i>Borges</i>
and all the fine cattle going about	y el ganado pastando

And here are some other choices made by Borges where his translation is not quite literal:

<i>Joyce</i>	<i>Borges</i>
atheist	librepensadores
he understood or felt	él comprendía
I could always get around him	lograría engatusarlo siempre

Another interesting moment is when Borges translates, “the watchman going about serene with his lamp,” as “el sereno pasando quietamente con su farol.” By choosing “sereno” instead of, say, “vigilante,” Borges manages to transpose the Latinate root, but displaces it unto a different word.

There is also an important set of decisions that Borges takes toward the end of the fragment. It begins with the phrase “the sea the sea,” which comes near the very end of Molly’s monologue. In English, it reads: “and O that awful deepdown torrent O and the sea the sea crimson sometimes like fire and the glorious sunsets...” The language here is becoming more and more sexually charged, the phrases swaying with building desire, as they build towards the climactic last “yes I will Yes.” Borges’ version does not lose any of the passion or rhythm of the original: “y Oh ese torrente atroz y de golpe Oh y el mar carmesí a ve-

ces como fuego y los ocasos brillantes....” In fact, although he does not repeat “el mar” (it would not have the same romantic effect in Spanish as it does in English), and says “ese torrente atroz y de golpe Oh” (instead of “that awful deepdown torrent”), the “y de golpe” can actually refer to the “torrente” or to the exclamation “Oh” that comes right afterwards, giving the exclamation “Oh” an extra erotic emphasis. Also, as Schwartz points out in what he calls a paronomastic equivalency in which an original effect is removed and dislocated to another place where it is not in the original but can be re-created in the translation (“Borges y la primera...” 723-4), Borges displaces the repetition to another place earlier in the monologue: “y las castañuelas y aquella noche en Algeciras cuando perdimos el vapor las castañuelas ...,” whereas the “castanets” only appear once in the English version.

Finally, in addition to translating the colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions, to making choices that correspond to the poetic and emotional mood of the text, to capturing the rhythm and the phrasing of Molly’s sensual stream of consciousness, Borges also captures the extreme eroticism and sexual desire that builds toward the end. It is interesting, in fact, that Borges would choose this particular moment of *Ulysses* to translate at all; one might think that Stephen’s stream of consciousness in the first part of the novel, or some of the moments of “Ithaca,” might have suited him better. For “Penelope,” and this last moment in particular, deals with sexual desire much more explicitly than any of Borges’ own work ever does. In any case, I agree with Schwartz with an instance—a very erotic one—in which Borges’ solution might be an improvement on the original version. Joyce’s says, “and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me”; Borges writes, “y primero lo abracé sí y encima mío lo agaché.” I would add that the conclusion, “yes I will Yes” sounds even more sexually explicit in Borges’ Spanish: “sí quiero Sí.”

But I did not set out to determine if this is an instance where a translation surpasses an original. What I have wanted to show is that well before elucidating his thoughts about translation in “Las versiones homéricas” and “Los traductores de las *1001 Noches*,” Borges was already practicing the kind of translation for which he was later to advocate. The examples I have outlined above reveal that, especially in the area of syntactic decisions, Borges never feels that he has to be literal. He is willing to take risks, to omit and change and exercise his preferences as needed. By executing these creative infidelities, he is able to be both literal and free, as he reads and captures the spirit of the text and

re-writes it in a new language and context. His attention to the details and subtleties of language, and his ability to distinguish between what might be an idiosyncratic character trait and a cultural linguistic one, is exquisite. And his literary habits also reveal a somewhat surprising capability to capture the full erotic expression found in Molly's language.

4. Totalizing Gestures: Funes Reads Joyce

The next point of contact I will consider is an article that appeared in the February, 1941 issue of *Sur*, entitled "Fragmento sobre Joyce," in which Borges finds a completely different way to dialogue with Joyce. The first part of the piece is an early, abbreviated version of "Funes el memorioso." Without the rivalry between the narrator and Funes, nor the many Uruguayan references, that the final version of the story would have three years later in *Artificios*, the outline given in this article is very much the same Funes, with the same perfect and total memory, which completely paralyzes him: "Su percepción y su memoria eran infalibles" (60). Fiddian, in discussing this very article, calls Funes "a monstrous hyperbole of the totalizing faculty" ("James Joyce and Spanish..." 29). Albeit a draft, Borges' description of Ireneo Funes already represents the creation of a literary monster.

Then Borges makes an abrupt shift in the article, and states: "Lo he recordado porque la consecutiva y recta lectura de las cuatrocientas mil palabras de *Ulises* exigiría monstruos análogos. (Nada aventuraré sobre los que exigiría *Finnegans Wake*...)" (61). The ironies involved in the connection between the two, especially if we consider the final version of "Funes," are numerous and brilliant. Borges states that it would take a monster like Funes (or more than one, perhaps, in the case of the *Wake*), in order to read *Ulysses*. Borges is critiquing not the sheer size of Joyce's work (there are definitely longer books than *Ulysses* or the *Wake*), but rather its totalizing tendencies⁵. But in order to do so, Borges must create a fictional projection of his own that has the capability to mirror the grandeur and totalizing gesture of *Ulysses* or the *Wake*. We understand the humor only after having read "Funes" (or the abbreviated version of it, in the case of this article).

⁵ In this part of the article, Borges makes another one of those comments about not having read *Ulysses* all the way through: "Yo (como el resto del universo) no he leído el *Ulises*, pero leo y releo con felicidad algunas escenas..." (61). I will come back to this in section 5 below.

Borges thus finds a fascinating and innovative way to read Joyce by creating a fictional projection that, through a process of fictive creation and analogy, links the two writers in a Borgesian (and Joycean?) dialogue. The relationship between the two has another ironic level because Borges' version is minuscule compared to Joyce's, and yet expresses the same literary possibility: to capture every moment, thought and emotion of a single day. Joyce asks a question: what would a novel look like that tried to account for every aspect of every single moment of a single day. The answer he gives is *Ulysses* for the daytime, and *Finnegans Wake* for the nighttime. Borges takes this same question, in response to Joyce, and answers with *Funes*: a short, clear and concise story that contains a character able to do (because of his perfect memory) what Joyce tried to do. One reading of "Funes" that is very strongly suggested by this article is that Borges creates a character that would be the ideal reader of Joyce. In order to do so, he encapsulates the same totalizing gesture in a creation of his own, even if he makes clear that *Funes* is a literary monster. The process, and the implied relationship between Borges and Joyce, is fascinating. Even if at one level Borges is criticizing Joyce, he is also clearly mirroring his totalizing tendencies, creating Joyce as a precursor through "Funes." In this light, we can look at Borges' conclusions at the end of the article as a judgment that applies to both writers, momentarily seen as doubles of each other:

El *Ulises* (nadie lo ignora) es la historia de un solo día, en el perímetro de una sola ciudad. En esa voluntaria limitación es lícito percibir algo más que una elegancia aristotélica; es lícito inferir que para Joyce, todos los días fueron de algún modo secreto el día irreparable del Juicio; todos los sitios, el Infierno o el Purgatorio. (61-62)

5. *Ulysses, the Wake and Translatability*

I have mentioned in passing some of the critiques and disparaging comments that Borges makes about Joyce's work. The persistence of these leads us to as what role they might have in Borges' dialogue with Joyce. Although there are a number of possible explanations for these comments, the one relevant to our discussion is their implication for issues of translation and translatability. As the years went by, in fact, we see an increasing tendency in Borges to describe *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* as untranslatable, even illegible.

In the 1941 *Sur* article “Fragmento sobre Joyce” discussed above, Borges says: “Nadie ignora que para los lectores desprevenidos, la vasta novela de Joyce es indescifrablemente caótica” (61). Then, in his 1946 review “Nota sobre el *Ulises* en español,” also discussed above, he states: “A priori, una versión cabal del *Ulises* me parece imposible” (49). But it is not surprising that Borges would believe so emphatically that a complete and exact version of *Ulysses* in Spanish is not possible. We know from “Las versiones homéricas” and “Los traductores de las *1001 Noches*” that he does not believe that a “cabal” version of any text is possible —although it may claim accurateness, Borges establishes that a literal translation is never faithful; and the translations Borges most values are those that contain creative infidelities. Furthermore, Borges himself had already produced not a “cabal,” but a reduced, one-page fragment of the novel some twenty years before this statement. As we have seen, it had the kinds of creative decisions that lead not to a “cabal” translation, but to a new version with the translator as a (co-)creator.

Although this may explain these particular comments, Borges’ stance only becomes more rigid with time. In the 1965 “Introducción a la literatura inglesa,” referring to *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, he states: “Los libros que hemos enumerado son intraducibles” (*OCC*: 854). And in the conference “La ceguera,” published in *Siete noches* in 1980, he says: “Tenemos esas dos vastas y por qué no decirlo ilegibles novelas que son *Ulises* y *Finnegans Wake*” (*OC* 3: 284). In part, these comments are related to how Borges uses Joyce. I will come back to what end Borges might be using Joyce shortly. But the issue that keeps coming back in Borges’ comments, regardless of their degree of hostility (in these later years) or of humor and wit (as in the earlier ironic comments), is on the possibility or impossibility of reproducing Joyce’s linguistic experiments in Spanish. In other words, on its translatability.

Thus, we arrive at another possible site of convergence (or divergence?) between Joyce and Borges. What is at stake here is the question of the limits —if any— of translation. In 1924, Joyce stated that he thought *Ulysses* was untranslatable (Ellmann 561). As we just saw, Borges eventually says the same thing, and repeated on several occasions. Both writers, however, belie their statements. As Ellmann details, encouraged by the first French translations organized by Valéry Larbaud, Joyce decides that *Ulysses* should be translated into French, and then participates actively in this production (Ellmann 521-524 and 600-602). Joyce would eventually come full circle, stating in 1930 that, “There is noth-

ing that cannot be translated” (Ellmann 632)⁶. Borges, on the other hand, can be seen to contradict himself by virtue of the fact that he himself managed a brilliant translation, although only a fragmentary one, of a section of *Ulysses*. Furthermore, based on the arguments in “Las versiones homéricas” and “Los traductores de las *1001 Noches*,” there is no reason to believe that Borges might not actually agree with Joyce’s later stance as well. Borges’ ambiguity forms part of a sophisticated, life-long reaction that reveals how one writer —Borges— goes about using another writer —Joyce— whose work allows him to meet his own needs.

Towards a Conclusion

In place of a conclusion, I want to go back to the comments in the very first article, the one accompanying the one-page translation of *Ulysses*, that Borges makes about not having read all seven hundred pages of Joyce’s novel. The fact that Borges continued these kind of remarks, and even insisted on them, as we have seen, suggests that the first comment he makes in 1925 in *Proa* cannot be simply disregarded as an initial response to *Ulysses*’ magnitude. If we look beyond Borges’ “false humility,” what we have is an early critique of the long novel, one that Borges would cultivate throughout his life. Furthermore, rhetorically, Borges’ statement is designed to disarm the reader: he sets the reader at ease, assuring him/her that he, also, has not had the patience to persevere through all of *Ulysses*. But then he goes on to write a few very interesting and erudite comments about the work, and finally concludes with the brilliant translation of the last page of *Ulysses*. By the end of this process, Borges and Joyce end up on an equal plane; Borges has mastered Joyce, so to speak, and he can now move on. The only thing needed, really, was one page (not the seven hundred pages!) —the last page, with its affirmative ending that Borges seems to apply toward himself as well— of Joyce’s *Ulysses*. The last page of *Ulysses* in English thus becomes the first page of *Ulysses* in Spanish; the last page of Joyce’s great work becomes the first page of what would be a long and interesting textual dialogue that Borges holds with Joyce throughout his life. It also becomes the first page in what can be considered a long

⁶ This change can be read as coming from Joyce at a point in which, fully immersed in the creation of *Finnegans Wake*, he believed that language —any language, in fact— was fully capable of being manipulated and wrought into any shape, and hence translated.

line of Ulyssean influence in Latin American fiction throughout the twentieth century ⁷.

Borges incorporates Joyce, as he does with all other writers and texts he refers to, into his own literary universe. As Fiddian has said, "Borges utilizes Joyce for his own purposes, yet without debasing or distorting his model" ("James Joyce and Spanish..." 29). And he does so not quite by manipulating what came before him, but by referring to their work in a manner that allows him to find new ways to dialogue with them. To read a text or write one —processes which turn out to be equivalent and interchangeable in Borges. It is not even a matter of changing the original, at times, as in Pierre Menard's version of *Don Quijote*, but of elucidating the new context in such a way as to make the text referred to glow with new meanings. There is no exhaustion in Borges' fictions; similarly, there is no loss or lack in translation, but rather an opportunity for gain.

In some ways, this is not unlike the way Joyce incorporates all previous styles in the English language into his own (as in "Oxen of the Sun"). Or the way that Joyce is able to write a new version of the *Odyssey*, and set it in Dublin, and have all the action occur in just one day. But there are two important differences between Borges and Joyce. First of all, Borges does not work with parody like Joyce does. Joyce, as he incorporates previous styles, seems to want to destroy them, whereas Borges can make previous writers and even entire traditions come to life (as in the gauchesque, or the Cabalistic traditions). And second of all, Joyce's work moves consistently toward myth, whereas Borges' moves toward the metaphysical. What I mean by this can be seen if we think about "El Inmortal," a story that has a number of similarities with *Ulysses* (Homer and the Wandering Jew, the tension between the personal and the mythical, etc.). But in Borges the story becomes a contemplation of history and (im)mortality, of the relationship of the individual to time. The myth, the possibility of being Homer, of being immortal, is rejected as a monstrous negation of self—as a "nadería de la personalidad." In Borges, Everyman becomes No man.

As we study how Borges reads Joyce, we witness an aspect of how Borges writes. Borges' dialogue with Joyce forces us to think of new ways to theorize translation and influence. The relationship between reading and translation in Borges is equivalent to the relationship be-

⁷ I am thinking of the kind of tracing of *Ulysses* in Latin American fiction that Gerald Martin has done in his *Journeys Through the Labyrinth*.

tween reading and writing. Translation is limitless in the same way that new meanings in texts are limitless, as illustrated by “Pierre Menard.” In theory, translation for Borges accomplishes the same blurring between writer, text, and reader that I mentioned in the introduction to this paper. In this sense, it is a metaphor for writing. Combined with practice, translation and writing, too, become equivalent and interchangeable: they become one and the same.

Sergio Gabriel Waisman
University of California, Berkeley

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