

“THE MINIONS OF MIDAS” AND “LAS MUERTES CONCÉNTRICAS”

*Valentina Camps*

JACK LONDON, A SOCIALIST OF HIS OWN KIND

Possibly one of the best-known writers in American literature, Jack London led a life which was as eventful as that of his characters. London published “The Minions of Midas” in 1901, by which time he had already been a convinced socialist for several years. London became an active member of the Socialist Labor Party in April 1896. He had entered the University of California but, in spite of his efforts and talent, was unable to complete his degree due to financial difficulties. A believer in the power of the individual to overcome difficulties, he took up a job to earn himself a living. London worked on ships, in mines and in canneries both in the Klondike and in Oakland where he lived side by side with those belonging to what he termed the “social pit”. The young man concluded that the workers’ real poverty lay in their terrible futures. He understood that once their strength was gone, these people’s lives were over. He saw with extreme clarity that there was nothing left for the laborers to do but work themselves to death. Jack London realized that the only way to escape a similar fate was to ‘sell his brains’, so he strove to make a living through writing.

London became considerably involved with the Socialist Labor Party of Oakland, even running for mayor twice, without success. In 1905 he wrote an essay about his political views called “How I Became a Socialist,” explaining why he believed the only hope for the working classes lay in socialism. Karl Marx appears to have been his main political and philosophical influence, though he also he owed much of his ideas to philosophers such as Herbert

Spencer,<sup>1</sup> Charles Darwin and Friedrich Nietzsche. Spencer, for example, was the first to elaborate on the concept of 'survival of the fittest,' central theme to "The Minions of Midas."

However, Jack London proved to be an eclectic thinker; he gave shape to ideas which could be considered contradictory *a priori*, and which were neither orthodox Marxism nor Darwinism. London believed in the brotherhood of men promised by socialism, while at the same time professing an inclination towards individualism in a way of which Marxism would never have approved. "The Minions of Midas" reflects this conflict, and I believe that Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares profited from this internal contradiction, though they knew it was less propitious for the author himself.

#### THE "MINIONS OF MIDAS": THE WELL-CONCEIVED PLOT

Jack London was intrigued by the lifestyle of the rich, writing several stories whose main characters belong to the upper classes. In this story, the author devised an anarchist group called The Minions of Midas who blackmail a wealthy magnate. The tale shows how little life is valued by both parties: on the one hand, The M of M show little remorse for the innocent victims they kill as means to put pressure on the cold-hearted magnate Eben Hale, who on the other hand, gives in to nothing.

The main narrator of the story is Mr. Hale's personal secretary and unexpected heir, Wade Atsheler, but the story is also narrated by the impersonal voice of the M of M, in the form of their letters and telegrams, as well as by John, Wade Atsheler's friend, who receives all the evidence of the plot. So London manages to show both points of view, and places the readers in the complicated position of judge and jury. However, it is quite relevant that though the M of M's viewpoint is clearly laid out in the story by means of their correspondence, Eben Hale's motives are only partially explained through Atsheler's narration, who at times finds it difficult to justify his boss's stubbornness. In the

---

<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, according to James Woodall, Borges's anarchism was also influenced by the evolutionary theories of Spencer (Woodall).

end, not even death will free the victims of the M of M from their harassment, and apparently there is nothing any powerful man can do to prevent their actions. Atsheler's plea to the press to move people to stand up against the M of M is the last we know of the story.

It is remarkable that the story is set in the turn of the twentieth century. The tale was first published in 1901 and clearly London was keen to write a story to which the reader of the time might relate and find plausible. In addition, I understand this setting as a statement regarding the promises that the twentieth century held for those who believed in the rise into power of the working classes. The turn of the century signaled the end of the old regime and the establishment of the new one; in London's mind, who was less concerned with socialist theories as such but more with the optimistic belief in a better world, the future surely had to bring social justice and the realization of the highest ideals of human kind: freedom, equality and brotherhood.

Together with his support of socialism, Jack London felt very strongly about Darwin's theory of evolution. It remains a paradox how he managed to combine his socialist views, which were based on cooperation rather than competition, with the theory of the survival of the fittest, which was advocated for by capitalist theoreticians. In this story in particular, he reconciles anarchism with social Darwinism, outlining the M of M's prediction of who were more likely to succeed in the world now that brains were proving more powerful than physical might. To what extent Borges associated himself to London's political views, it is hard to say.

#### BORGES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING POLITICALLY INTELLIGENT

Borges declared he was an anarchist more than once, but quickly detached himself from the leftist movements which populated the trade unions in his country and which more often than not called themselves anarchists too. If he was an anarchist it was because he believed that the less a government interfered in the lives of the people, the more ideal a government it became. In consonance with this belief, he found totalitarian governments, such as the communist and fascist governments, intolerable. He wrote against the

Nazi movement more than once, not only because he found the discrimination against the Jewish people horrible, but also because he knew the Nazi's were feeding on the ignorance and the fear of the uneducated masses. This was the very same argument he and Bioy used against Peronism in Argentina some years later. It was the fact that these movements benefited from "barbarity" and encouraged brutality, that he loathed the most. According to James Woodall, Borges stated that dictatorships fostered oppression, servility and cruelty, but worse of all, they fostered stupidity (Woodall, 222).

Thus, if we were to call Borges an anarchist of any kind, it will have to be one of his own. He adhered to no philosophical or political movements, and even though he had been very much engaged in politics as a young man (in the 1920s, supporting a nationalist candidate in particular), he looked back on those years with shame.<sup>2</sup> He had felt very passionately about politics then and had felt disappointed by politicians' lack of efficiency. He despised politics and was vehement when talking about the subject. According to Emir Rodríguez Monegal, in vain did his friends advise him against making all sorts of outrageous statements in public. His opinions shocked audiences world widely, and if there is anything we can derive from them is Georgie's utter contempt towards human stupidity and his total skepticism regarding politicians. In a time when being 'apolitical' in Latin-America was unthinkable, Borges declared that he had never read a newspaper in his life and that he knew nothing about politics, and then went on to praise some of the most notorious regimes in the world such as Augusto Pinochet's in Chile or Francisco Franco's in Spain (Rodríguez Monegal, "Borges and Politics", 55). The reasons why he associated himself to those dreadful figures are not fully clear, but during Argentina's periods of political turmoil in the 1960s and 1970s, he did mention that he wished for an illustrated dicta-

<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, when *Sur* published *Ficciones* in the 1940s (a new edition of *The Garden of Forking Paths* which included six new stories), as was customary at the time, there was a brief account of the author's work. It can be noticed that there are three books of essays which he wrote in the 1920s missing from the list, and which he later eliminated from his *Complete Works*. (Vaccaro, 431&442). In Alan Pauls's opinion, Borges was trying to conceal his nationalist years, since he was a fervent national-populist in the 1920s. (11)

torship, one which would pull the Argentineans out of the darkness that ideologies were sinking them into.

Borges was not committed to any ideals or theories but his own, and it is highly unlikely that he ever felt close to socialism. What is more, from his point of view, socialism brought about mediocrity, since personal initiative and individual drive were deemed sinful, and therefore intelligence was discouraged and freethinking forbidden. Borges defended his freethinking passively, by not attaching his name directly to any movement, though on the few occasions he did, it was with poor results. The translation of "The Minions of Midas" appears to have attempted to show the sense of helplessness that any victim of blackmailing suffers. Borges and Bioy were more concerned with the psychological aspects of the characters than with the political implications. They wrote a version of "The Minions of Midas" which reflects the despair and loneliness the main characters have to endure and which eventually lead to their deaths. I also believe they succeeded in demonstrating the conflict of ideals between older and younger generations. Nevertheless, it would be naïve to assume that Borges and Bioy's work remained completely free from their personal political outlooks.

#### TRANSLATING FROM THE EDUCATED MARGINS

Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares took up translation not only as a kind of hobby, but also as a means of making a text their own. They decided they could give the pieces they translated something new and improve them, bring them closer to the kind of text they would write. This meant that they took every liberty regarding the originals. Though they did respect the basic stories, as far as the language was concerned, they "corrected" whatever they found was not good enough. In *Borges*, Bioy's diary of his near-daily encounters with Georgie, which was posthumously published by Daniel Martino (Bioy's literary executor), there are insights on their "correcting" impulses. Borges and Bioy discussed in private the lacks and excesses of their friends and enemies. They were ruthless in their criticism of even the most renowned writers of all times (Chitarroni).

To Borges and Bioy a piece of good literary writing could not have a word more or a word less; every word must have a reason to be a part of the whole. So probably most of the changes they introduced had to do with doing away with what they considered were unnecessary items, especially the wordiness, and the pompous vocabulary. Moreover, in Borges and Bioy's writing, timing was of utter importance. They preferred a combination of short and long sentences and paragraphs to set a certain pace in the narration. Thus, syntax had to contribute to that effect and if they found they had to change the original word order, they did so, unblinkingly. Borges was extremely hard on himself, too. Concerning his first poems, he declared to Bioy in 1969 that they were so bad that he found it impossible to correct them (Cozarinsky).

For Borges and Bioy reading and writing were part of the same process. When they translated they rewrote, mutilated and modified the originals freely, in pursuit of the desired literary effect or just for the pleasure of getting there (Cozarinsky). To Borges and Bioy a piece of good literary writing could not have a word more or a word less; every word must have a reason to be a part of the whole. Borges actually dared to state that William Shakespeare, "the divine amateur", always used "le mot injuste" (Cozarinsky). So probably most of the changes they introduced had to do with doing away with what they considered were unnecessary items, especially the wordiness, and the pompous vocabulary. Regarding this interest in literary austerity, Borges praised simplicity in other writers' works. For instance, he mentioned to Bioy once how much more lucid was Henry James's method of writing than Gustave Flaubert's. Once James had heard the essentials of a story, he refused to hear further details or explanations, and thus the tale sprang to life in his mind from its basic elements (Sánchez). That was Borges's idea of a good story: one which was read as if one was gliding over a perfectly polished surface, devoid of unnecessary ornaments (Sarlo). Therefore, to write is to correct. However, Borges and Bioy did not correct in a moral sense, but in a technical one (Villoro).

Borges in particular was very aware that coherence was fundamental throughout a text to turn it into a plausible story. He

criticized thoroughly the work of other authors whose language was so distant from the characters' and the target audience's that the speeches sounded impossible (Cozarinsky). Coherence was attained by thinking carefully not only of the language but also of the character which was supposed to have produced it, considering its situation and its audience. In addition, in this story by Jack London, they must have taken care of the notions they wanted to convey regarding the behavior and the motives of the characters, so close attention was paid to style.

In their quest for the most natural voice, the translators surely tried to produce what they thought was most appropriate according to the setting and the characters' backgrounds. London's original was written in a very elaborate language; it would sound too sophisticated in the 1940s' Latin-American. It is my view that Borges and Bioy tried to write a story in which the voices of the characters did not sound too farfetched, though they most likely did not sound so at the time of their publication in English. I would also argue that they had a further motivation in bringing naturalness to the characters' speeches in Spanish. Despite being an educated young man, Wade Atsheler and his friend John could not sound too affected, lest the Spanish-speaking audience be led to read a statement of their class too clearly between the lines. If there was one sort of prejudice Borges and Bioy did not want to trigger it was against the educated class. Referencing Alicia Borinsky, Mark F. Frisch writes:

[she] takes issue with the suggestion that Borges's writings are neutral and apolitical. She contends that, in effect, this neutrality becomes re-inscribed as the interested discourse of an ideological elite. In so doing, the writings create an opposition between intelligence and ignorance, and feed the sarmentista dichotomy between 'civilización y barbarie' [civilization and barbarity]. She argues that these 'neutral' discourses work against themselves and assume a political message." (Frisch, 130)

It is relevant too, that the style in which the correspondence of the M of M was written showed good education, though not good breeding (owing to the contents and not to the language). I believe they have shown their political inclinations in their translation.

As usual, they resorted to changing the original syntax and to elision as their main tools of simplification and improvement, and they ended up making a statement.

Much has been written about Borges's political views and his opinions, but not much about how they permeated his writing. In Emir Rodríguez Monegal's words: "Criticism has almost totally ignored Borges's political works...Borges the writer is a genius; Borges the political man, an idiot" ("Borges and Politics" 55). According to Mark Frisch, "Borges's writings contain many overtones that suggest a political attitude," not necessarily a neutral one (130). However much we may contend that being neutral is already a political stance, and I agree it is, I do not think Borges and Bioy aimed at neutrality when translating this story. While their translation strategy was loyal to an esthetic project which assumed less was more, this does not mean that the translators did not wish to give the story their personal outlook. It my intention in this paper to evidence of Borges and Bioy's lack of neutrality in their translation of "The Minions of Midas."

#### THE TRANSLATORS' DECISIONS

Stemming from their intention to produce a version which was devoid of unnecessary embellishments in terms of its language, Borges and Bioy embarked upon the simplification of the syntactic tools that London used in his narrative.<sup>3</sup> They changed the order of sentences whose original syntax they deemed too extravagant, or too pompous:

L: Why this should be so we could not at the time understand,...

BB: No podíamos entender entonces la razón de todo esto;...

L: ...and those best fitted to survive are the intellectually and commercially powerful

BB: ...y los intelectual y comercialmente poderosos son los más aptos para sobrevivir.

---

<sup>3</sup> For more on Borges and his approach to translation, see Sergio Waisman's *Borges y La traducción. La irreverencia de la periferia*.



One possible explanation for these modifications might be that they intended the account to be written as if someone were telling the story orally. One would not normally use the kind of syntax of the original when speaking. Still they kept the register; the speakers are educated people.

I believe the following example to be more interesting; not only does it involve a modification in terms of syntax, but also an elision.

L: It was the principle, he affirmed, that he was fighting for, not the gold.

BB: Decía que luchaba por un principio.

The syntactic change might be explained along the same lines of the previous examples, with the addition that a shorter sentence usually creates a sharper contrast in the paragraph; it does sound more blunt and definite. The elision might derive from the same intention; had they written: *Decía que luchaba por un principio, no por el oro*, the bluntness would have been lost in great extent. However, not mentioning the gold allows for other options: pride, power, stubbornness, etc. The sheer mention of gold as a reason for fighting (even if not considered), would have turned Eben Hale into a money-grubbing tycoon; it would have allowed for suspicion among the readers. This way, only the principle is mentioned and he appears a more honorable man—especially regarding the concept of what was honorable for Borges and Bioy. A real Argentinean gentleman should never be concerned with money, that was the idea of true greatness most of the men of Borges and Bioy's generation shared. It is likely that Borges and Bioy intended to make Mr. Hale's motivations more acceptable considering their target audience (who was obviously not London's). In any case, Mr. Hale is a different man in each version; even though he is present in both, one feels more inclined to doubt his good intentions when reading Jack London's version.

In several passages, bits were simply elided; the inclusion of the deleted phrases did not mean better understanding, or because the shock in the reader would be more powerful if the sen-

tences and/or the paragraphs were shorter. This was a strategy widely used by Borges and Bioy in their translations:

L: The next instant Mr. Hale was at the telephone, warning the Inspector of the impending murder. The Inspector excused himself in order to call up Police Sub-station F and dispatch men to the scene. Fifteen minutes later he rang us up and informed us that the body had been discovered, yet warm, in the place indicated.

BB: Enseguida el señor Hale avisó por teléfono al comisario. Quince minutos después, éste nos comunicó que el cadáver, todavía caliente, había sido hallado en el lugar indicado.

There are, however, several omissions that unequivocally transform the meaning of the original. I would argue that these were not the result of a deleting frenzy but of a clear intention to transmit something different from the original:

L: We are of the unwashed, but with this difference: our brains are of the best, and we have no *foolish* ethical nor social scruples.

BB: Perteneceamos al bajo pueblo, pero con esta diferencia: nuestras mentes están entre las mejores, y no nos traban escrúpulos éticos o sociales.

The word "*foolish*" makes a great difference. One may interpret that the M of M have scruples, but they are not of the foolish kind; whereas in Borges-Bioy's version, they do not have scruples at all. I think it is not a coincidence that this omission appears linked to the mention of the M of M being "*of the unwashed*." I am inclined to believe that some of Borges and Bioy's prejudices regarding the workers' movements have permeated into their translation. It would not be accurate to say that Borges and Bioy's contempt was for the working classes in general. Even though Bioy came from a patrician home, Borges did not grow up in a wealthy neighborhood. During several years he was very much attracted to the life and the language of the periphery of Buenos Aires. As James Woodall explains, Borges's home was set in Palermo, a neighbourhood of slaughterhouses and bars. Even though the Borges family did not have much contact with that reality, Georgie felt a strong fascination for that world, which he chose as the setting for some of

his stories and whose slang (*lunfardo*) he adopted for some of his characters (Woodall). What is more, Borges and Bioy wrote from the margins of the world investing the periphery with the same relevance of the centre. They nourished their writing with the River Plate's multicultural tradition: a melting pot of people from every walk of life (Sarlo). It was not that they immediately associated toil and slang to lack of intelligence. It was not that he immediately associated toil and slang to lack of intelligence. What he despised were those people, workers or intellectuals, who could not rise above the propaganda they had been brainwashed to accept. He did not have a particular fancy for the right or the left, since he felt the same disgust for both Fascism and Communism. In "La censura" (*Textos recobrados*, 305-306), Borges wrote that the State's weight on the individual was the worst evil of our times. For him, the individual was real, whereas the State was an abstraction which the politicians of every political party abuse. Borges believed in the individual: "...la muchedumbre es una entidad ficticia, lo que realmente existe es cada individuo." <sup>4</sup> ("En Diálogo I", 36).

I believe that one of the intentions behind this elision was to create a contradiction, which in English might not be interpreted as such: the M of M believed themselves to be intelligent and yet behaved like barbarians. If the Minions of Midas were among the best brains, how could they possibly have no scruples or ethics? This conflict was not produced by the writer of the fiction, but by the M of M itself, since this excerpt belongs to the transcription of one of their letters. If we accept the fiction, then we must see the incoherence. Incoherence which was not present in London's original.

Probably one of the most salient cases of "mis-translation" is that of the word "minions" for "sicarios". In the Real Academia Española dictionary, the only meaning for "sicario" is "hired assassin"; whereas the word in English, as appears in the Oxford English Dictionary, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary and the Webster's Dictionary, is used to refer to a servile or unimportant follower of a powerful person. The great difference in meaning between the original "minion" and the chosen "sicario" is so large that it would be impossible to ignore.

<sup>4</sup> ...the crowd is a fictitious entity, what really exists is the individual (my translation).

To add more fuel to the controversy, the word 'minion' was originally used in English (c. 1500) to refer to a homoerotic relationship between a male minion and his patron, in a derogatory way. One wonders whether that connection to homoeroticism had anything to do with Borges and Bioy's decision to eliminate it from their version, since Borges in particular is known to have declared time and again his contempt for homosexuality as a literary subject, or for any sexual issues for that matter. He specifically expressed his contempt to Bioy for Manuel Mujica Lainez's writing technique; in Borges's mind "Manucho" would make an irrelevant situation the focus of a story, and spice it up with what he considered amusing features such as homosexuality, just because it was considered modern to include such themes (Sánchez). He also felt uncomfortable before Silvina Ocampo's prose, which totally differed from her husband's—Bioy—especially concerning such details as the sexuality of her characters (Cozarinsky).

I am, however, more inclined to believe that if this connotation of the word "minion" in English had any influence on their choice in Spanish, it was secondary to what the word "sicario" had to offer. They could have chosen a word devoid of any homosexual attachments, such as "seguidores," which would have been closer to "minion" than "sicario." Still they chose a word which in itself contains a high element of violence. No one can think of the word 'sicario' in Spanish without associating it to violent death. The effect on the reader is of greater helplessness and more compassion for the poor victims. Borges and Bioy's blackmailers sound even more dangerous, though again, the intended meaning is the same in both versions.

Coherent with this decision, they also changed the title of the story to "Las muertes concéntricas," bringing the word "deaths" to the fore. I believe the title is more revealing on the one hand, and more cryptic on the other. Once one has read the first pages of the story by Jack London, the Minions of Midas of the title are revealed to the reader. In *Las Muertes Concéntricas*, even after one has finished the story, one is left pondering on the interpretations of the title. To my mind, Borges and Bioy's choice was more careful, the result of their wish to write an improved story. Nev-

ertheless, the overall effect, as I see it, is to create a more violent background to begin with, as well as a less reasonable group of criminals. I cannot help but see the political stance of Borges and Bioy behind these results. The M of M were already violent and unreasonable in London's version, by taking them one step further, Borges and Bioy made sure sympathy for The M of M was even more difficult.

Having already dealt with the translation of the word "minions" as a "mistranslation," it is worth mentioning other interesting "mistranslations" in the story. For instance, some do not seem to alter much the final result and it is pretty obvious that the main motive for Borges and Bioy to "mistranslate" was naturalness. All along their version, they attempt at producing a story which an uninformed reader would not suspect of being a translation. Their aim at all times is to produce a better piece than London's.

L: The great trusts and business combinations (*with which you have your rating*) prevent us from *rising to the place among you which our intellects qualify us to occupy*.

BB: Los grandes trust y combinaciones de negocios (*entre los que sobresale el que usted dirige*) nos impiden *levantarnos al lugar que nuestra inteligencia reclama*.

It can be easily noticed that the meaning of the italicized phrases in each version are not quite the same. In the Spanish version, Hale's business stands out, whereas in the English version his business is well-rated. In the English version, the place the M of M claim for themselves is "among" the rich and powerful businessmen because they are intellectually qualified for such a place; while in the Spanish version the place they deserve in society is the one their intelligence claims for them, no mention of whom they should share the place with. I believe that in this case, they were concerned with what would be more naturally said in Spanish.

Last but not least, there is a very unusual intrusion in the M of M's last correspondence:

L: You believe you are the fittest. We leave the eventuality to *time and law*.

BB: Vosotros creéis ser los más aptos. Dejamos la eventualidad *al tiempo y a Dios*.

Why would a group of terrorist anarchists like the M of M trust God with anything? This scandalous “mistranslation” must answer to some practical joke Borges and Bioy decided to play on their readers. One should not underestimate their intellect in the same way they apparently underestimated their readers’. At the same time, they are expressing their contempt for these so-called anarchist groups which in the end were no better than the groups they were fighting against. Let us not forget that at all times their intention was to depict The M of M as a contradictory gang. By creating this conflict, Borges and Bioy deprive the M of M of any reasonable claim to justice, since all the ideological foundation for their pretensions is a farce, an excuse to steal and kill. What is more, they are in the antipodes of human law, so Borges and Bioy seem to refuse to mention it, God’s hand seems better suited to judge them all. A bit more than five years later (1947), during Peronism in Argentina, Borges and Bioy wrote a story under the penname H. Bustos Domecq called “La fiesta del monstruo”<sup>5</sup> (a possible literal translation of the title could be “The Monster’s Feast”). Through an overpoliticized satire they portrayed a group of fanatical peronistas as mindless assassins, as if all Perón had done was to grant them a license to kill. In Borges and Bioy’s minds, these people were not following ideals, they were just after their own pursuits and these ideologies simply suited their needs. They would follow anyone who would give them what they wanted. In the same fashion as in “La fiesta del monstruo,” Borges and Bioy tried to reveal the real drives behind these violent movements. It would be wrong, from my point of view, to consider that Borges and Bioy envisaged the M of M’s arrogations as political. Quite on the contrary, they tried their best to show them as opportunistic pirates, nothing but ordinary criminals.

---

<sup>5</sup> According to Emir Rodríguez Monegal, this text was not published in Argentina during Perón’s rule. As a matter of fact, it was only published after Perón’s downfall in *Marcha*, in Montevideo. (*Ficcionario. Antología de textos de Borges*, 458)

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

I have only attempted to explain how Borges and Bioy's political opinions might have influenced on the translating decisions in their version of Jack London's "The Minions of Midas." I have based my explanations on the evidence provided by the translations Borges published and also on the essays on translation that he produced and that others wrote on him. As I see it, the versions speak for themselves. Both have suffered with the passing of time. When Borges and Bioy set out to translate "The Minions of Midas" forty years had elapsed since London had written it, as well as two World Wars. The long nineteenth century, in the words of Eric Hobsbawm, was over and the twentieth had finally begun. For those who had hoped for the establishment of a socialist government as a panacea for all the working classes' ailing, the Soviet reality and Stalinism struck hard. The ideals of Communism, modern in the sense that they considered mankind would behave according to the interests of the majority, proved to be too idealistic. The postmodern world brought much disappointment to the true believers, time and again.

Borges and Bioy's "Las muertes concéntricas" was published in 1942, more than sixty years ago. Juan Domingo Perón, the dictator whom Borges blamed for most of the monstrous events which sank Argentina into what he deemed a cultural pit, rose to power in 1946. Much to Borges's fear, Perón represented everything he had loathed about the European totalitarian dictators. Borges, though he was not the only one, suffered personally the consequences of his disagreement. When Perón rose to power in 1946, Borges, who worked in a public library, was mysteriously "promoted" to the position of Poultry and Rabbit Inspector in Buenos Aires markets. Of course he resigned immediately ("Autobiografía", 112). Together with a group of intellectuals related to revista *Sur*, they had to put up with censorship and even punishment—Victoria Ocampo was jailed during Perón's rule. Many Argentineans considered Borges a member of an elite who wrote against the country's best tradition, while all the time he was trying to rescue what he considered best of the Argentinean culture (Demarchi). It was clear at the time that what he and Bioy wrote

had a political message. However, Borges and Bioy, the literary geniuses, have risen above any other considerations, and the politics in their literature have apparently been covered by layers of readings, interpretations, and historical events. Something similar has occurred with Jack London's literature. Despite the fact that it is widely accepted that he was a socialist, his political views are not the main focus of interpretation of his writing.

It is hard to read these two stories unless you bear in mind the world has changed so much since they were written. Yet, what they state about human beings is as valid now as it was one hundred years ago. Borges was able to capture in the stories he published that which is the essence of humankind. He was a critical observer of the human being, intolerant of whomever he considered a brute, no matter how laureate, and probably his skepticism as well as Bioy's was not only in regards to politics but every other aspect of life. Life was probably easier for Bioy, who had someone he could look up to. According to Rodolfo Rabanal in his review of Bioy's *Borges*, Adolfo Bioy Casares was bright enough to discover, nevertheless, that Borges's talent was flawless. This discovery gave impulse to a friendship close to devotion. Borges was a friend who was also a kind of literary guru (Rabanal). Nevertheless, their skepticism did not prevent them from enjoying themselves while writing and reading, and being political, in their own way. Their translating partnership was very prolific and was founded on their good friendship, and I believe that they were moved more by the enjoyment it brought them than by anything else.

*Valentina Camps*  
*Universidad de la República*

#### WORKS CITED

- Bioy Casares, Adolfo; Borges, Jorge Luis, *Crónicas de Bustos Domecq*, Buenos Aires: Losada, 1967.
- . *Los mejores cuentos policiales*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1943.



- Borges, Jorge Luis. "La censura". *Borges en Sur 1931-1980*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1999.
- . "Las dos maneras de traducir". *Textos Recobrados (1956-1986)*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2001.
- . *This Craft of Verse, edited by Calin Andrei Mihailescu*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, England, 2000.
- . "Ultraísmo". *Nosotros* (1921): 151.
- Chitarroni, Luis. "Macanas Fritas". *Página 12*. 13 May 2007. 10 March 2008 <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/radar/subnotas/3806-601-2007-05-13.html>>.
- Cozarinsky, Edgardo, "Borges, de Adolfo Bioy Casares: dos amigos implacables". *La Nación*. 24 September 2006. 21 February 2008 <[http://www.lanacion.com.ar/Archivo/nota.asp?nota\\_id=842807](http://www.lanacion.com.ar/Archivo/nota.asp?nota_id=842807)>.
- Costa, Walter Carlos. "Borges, O Original Da Tradução". *Cadernos de Tradução* 15 (2005): 187-210.
- Demarchi, Rogelio. "Borges y el peronismo (una exploración): el caso de la gauchesca". *Espéculo. Revista de estudios literarios* 36 (2007). Acceso: <http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero36/borperon.html>.
- Frisch, Mark F. *You might be able to get there from here: reconsidering Borges and the Postmodern*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2004.
- González Echevarría, Roberto. "Man Without a Life". *New York Times*, 31 agosto 1997. Acceso: [http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/31/reviews/970831.31gonz01.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/31/reviews/970831.31gonz01.html?_r=1&oref=slogin).
- Krause, Martín. "La filosofía política de Jorge Luis Borges". *Laissez-Faire* 15 (2001): 78-82.
- Kristal, Efraín. *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2002.
- London, Jack. *War of the Classes: How I Became a Socialist*. Macmillan, 1905.
- Martínez, Horacio L. "Borges, 20 años. Notas para una biografía política de Borges". *Metapolítica* 43 (2006). 21 February 2008 <[http://www.metapolitica.com.mx/?method=display\\_articulo&idarticulo=60&idpublicacion=1&idnumero=10](http://www.metapolitica.com.mx/?method=display_articulo&idarticulo=60&idpublicacion=1&idnumero=10)>.

- Pauls, Alan. "La fiesta de los monstruos". *Página 12*, 13 May 2007. 26 February 2008 <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/radar/subnotas/3806-599-2007-05-13.html>>.
- Rabanal, Rodolfo. "Borges, una región fuera del alcance". *Página 12*, 13 May 2007. 10 March 2008 <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/radar/subnotas/3806-600-2007-05-13.html>>.
- Rodríguez Monegal, Emir. "Borges and Politics". *Diacritics* 8.4 (1978): 55-69.
- Tatian, Diego. "Borges y la Política". *Jornadas ARS Preparatorias al VI Congreso Nacional de la Sociedad de Estudios Morfológicos de la Argentina, FAUD-UNC*, 27 mayo 2005.
- Waisman, Sergio. *Borges y La traducción. La irreverencia de la periferia*. Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2005.
- Willson, Patricia. "Traductores en el siglo". *Punto de Vista* 87 (2007). Acceso: [http://www.bazaramericano.com/ultnum/revistas/nro\\_87\\_willson.htm](http://www.bazaramericano.com/ultnum/revistas/nro_87_willson.htm)
- Woodal, James. *Borges: A Life*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.
- Sarlo, Beatriz. *Borges, un escritor en las orillas*. Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1995.
- Vaccaro, Alejandro. *Borges. Vida y Literatura*. Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2006.
- Villoro, Juan. "Vida privada de la tradición". *Página 12*, 13 May 2007. 26 February 2008 <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/radar/subnotas/3806-602-2007-05-13.html>>.
- Woodall, James. *La Vida de Jorge Luis Borges: El hombre en el espejo del libro*. Barcelona: Gedisa, 1999.