The Faulkner Journal

Volume XXIV Number 1
Fall 2008

Special Issue
Faulkner: Beyond the United States

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The Faulkner Journal

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Faulkner, Borges, and the Translation of *The Wild Palms*: The Evolution of Borges's Theory Concerning the Role of the Reader in the Game of Literature

Introduction

Borges's keen interest in translation is well known, as is his theory of the crucial role that the reader plays in the production of literary meaning. A leading translation theorist, Lawrence Venuti, has praised Borges for his hitherto ignored insights into the art of translation (*Translation Studies Reader* 13-14), while the noted scholar and critic Efraín Kristal, with his *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation*, has provided us with an excellent in-depth study of the many connections between Borges's work as a translator and writer. And the late Emir Rodríguez Monegal has succinctly summed up the critical opinion regarding Borges's landmark view of the reader, which first captured the attention of critics in France during the early 1960s.[1] Also widely acknowledged is the excellence of Borges's 1940 Spanish translation of Faulkner's *The Wild Palms* (1939), a novel that, under Borges's inspired hand, would prove to be quite influential for an entire generation of young Spanish American writers, many of whom would gain renown in the 1960s and 1970s when Latin American literature first began to gain a beachhead in the United States (Monegal 373). Indeed, it might well be argued that, thanks to Borges's faithful if occasionally finessed translation of *The Wild Palms*, Faulkner could rightly be regarded as not only an influence on but an authentic progenitor of the "nueva novela hispanoamericana" ("new Spanish American novel") and of the "Boom" era itself.[2] This assertion, if accepted, would, by virtue of being based on a detailed and entirely verifiable case of influence and reception, lend additional credence to the rapidly emerging field of inter-American literature, which itself depends to a large extent on translation, both linguistic and cultural (Lowe and Fitz 1-24, 163-66; Balderston and Schwartz 1-12; McClennen 119-23).[3]

[1] The first detailed exposition of this argument may well have been Gérard Genette's study, "La littérature selon Borges."

[2] As many scholars have noted. See Cohn 8-30; Edwards 60, 62-64, 71-73; and Díaz-Diocaretz 30-33, 35-38.

[3] Inter-American literature can be defined as the comparative study of authors and texts from North, Central, and South America. Although the triadic model, involving at least three of the New World's literatures, should be viewed as the prototype—the most productive form of comparative inter-American literary scholarship—there are certain cases (often involving issues of influence and reception) that lend themselves naturally to a two-sided study. The Faulkner/Borges relationship is one of these.

What is not so clear, however, is the exact nature of the relationship between Borges's translation of the Faulkner novel, which he knew did not rank among Faulkner's greatest achievements, and his evolving theory about the importance of the reader's role in the creation of a text's meaning and significance. In Borges's view, "To translate is to produce literature, just as the writing of one's own work is—and it is more difficult, more rare. In the end all literature is translation" (qtd. in Kristal, *Invisible Work* 32). As evidenced by the numerous alterations, large and small, that Borges makes in his translation of *The Wild Palms*, it seems beyond dispute that as he read the Faulkner text, Borges was consciously engaged not only in a process of interpretation and evaluation, but of creativity and even refinement as well. After scrutinizing both texts carefully and comparatively, it is evident that his version of *The Wild Palms*, *Las palmeras salvajes*, reflects not a series of isolated translation decisions but a coherent creative vision, one that must have verified for Borges his growing belief that the discerning reader's mind is the true site of a text's flowering, both in the original language and, as we will demonstrate in the course of this study, in its translation as well.

To grasp the rationale behind this argument, a bit of literary history is in order. We know that after his Christmas Eve accident in 1938 Borges was concerned about his mental faculties and about his ability to write.[4] We also know that the celebrated *ficción* "Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*" ("Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"), appearing in 1939, was not only the first text that Borges completed upon his recovery but the first example of what critics would later term his "literatura fantástica," a new kind of writing that explicitly eschewed the traditional demands of realism as mimetic representation in favor of magic, understood in the anthropological or epistemological sense. Also occurring in 1939 was the publication of Faulkner's novel, *The Wild Palms*, a work that Borges, who taught English and American literature at the University of Buenos Aires and who was a perceptive critic of Faulkner, read very carefully, coming, finally, to write a short but judicious commentary about it for the magazine *El Hogar* in May of 1939. The result of this period of health-related stress, intense creative activity, and theorizing about the nature of narrative was the publication, via the prestigious Sudamérica publishing house, of Borges's translation, *Las palmeras salvajes*, in 1940. It is our contention that Borges, who had long viewed the creative transaction that is translation as absolutely fundamental to the process of literary interpretation itself (Kristal, "Borges y la traducción" 3-5, 22-23; Kristal, *Invisible Work* 1-35; Díaz-Diocaretz 30-34), was not only reading *The Wild Palms* but, at least in his mind, also translating it, or imagining how he might do so, even as he was writing "Pierre Menard," a story that George Steiner lauds as "the most acute, most concentrated commentary anyone has offered on the business of translation. What studies of translation there are . . . could, in Borges's style, be termed a commentary on his commentary" (70).

[4] [illegible] and soon afterward fell seriously ill with

By building on the work of Steiner, Venuti, Emir Rodríguez Monegal, Efraín Kristal, and Gregory Rabassa, and by comparing the original Faulkner text with Borges's transformation of it, we will argue in this essay that *Las palmeras salvajes* should be read not merely as an example of a particularly successful translation by a modern master, but also as the final proof Borges needed to crystalize in his own mind the most radical feature of his new poetics: that it is the reading of a text, and not its writing, that truly "creates the work" and allows it to blossom (Monegal 77). We also believe that, at this critical juncture in his professional life, Borges used his translation of *The Wild Palms* as a model for the development of a new kind of narrative fiction, one emphasizing the ironically self-referential quality of the two intertwined stories that comprise the novel, their hallucinatory, or "magical," allure as verbal artifice, and their disruptions of narrative time and place to concretize his as yet inchoate ideas about what his own "nueva narrativa," or "new narrative," would be like (Monegal 4n4, 247-49; Fitz 1-4, 21-22). *Las palmeras salvajes*, we contend, should be read in conjunction with "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" as a crucial part of Borges's narrative revolution, one that depends on the reader's role in the creative process and on the innumerable ways the act of translation makes manifest this then audacious theory.

Generally keeping his translation as tight, taut, and dense as the Faulkner original, the Borges version nevertheless tends, at times, to clarify both Faulkner's syntax and his panoply of rich Southern dialects and registers, to heighten both the drama ("Old Man," which Borges, like most Faulkner scholars, felt was the superior story)[5] and the melodrama ("The Wild Palms") and to make a few alterations, mainly restructurings and deletions, that appear to have been dictated by his own aesthetic criteria (Kristal, *Invisible Work* 38-39). All in all, what we have with Borges's *Las palmeras salvajes* is a startlingly new kind of novel for the fledgling "Boom" novelists to study, one highlighted by

> a writing style that was the equivalent of the original's English. For many young Latin American novelists who did not know enough English to read the dense original, Borges's tight version meant the discovery of a new kind of narrative writing. They had, in Borges, the best possible guide to Faulkner's dark and intense world. (Monegal 373)

As important as this argument is to our understanding of the relationship between Borges and Faulkner, it is not the entire story. The likelihood that Borges was working on his landmark 1939 tale, "Pierre Menard," at the same time that he was penning his *El Hogar* review of *The Wild Palms* and at the same time that he was engaged in the translation of the Faulkner novel, strongly suggests that Borges's new sense of the reader's importance found its most concrete realization in the form of the translation he was making. As the work of the renowned translator and literary scholar Gregory Rabassa has long demonstrated, a successful translation is really the result of a meticulous

and sensitive reading coupled with a careful, yet never slavish, rewriting of the original, a point with which Borges, already in 1939, would almost certainly have agreed (*Treason* 1-50). The most salient aspect of "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" is precisely this: that reading is more central to a text's intellectual "life" than its writing and that, consequently, a reader is more important to a text than its writer. Of this same creative fusion of reading and writing Gabriel García Márquez has written that he regards translation as "the deepest kind of reading," the kind that an imaginative artist like Borges would have understood intuitively (25). In transforming *The Wild Palms* into *Las palmeras salvajes*, and in publishing "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" in the same year, Borges must have felt that his translation of the Faulkner novel amounted to a validation of his new theory about reading, which, as many critics have noted, was adroitly scripted into this famous *ficción*.

We believe that the best way to see the connection between Borges's canny translation of *The Wild Palms* and the distillation of his theory of the importance of the act of reading is to examine textual examples of the kinds of decisions that Borges makes as he reads the Faulkner text and seeks to recast it in twentieth-century Spanish. By concentrating not so much on the specific, isolated instances where Borges adds to or takes from the original text but on the *kinds*, or *types*, of decisions he makes as he reads and translates it, we believe we can show how Borges is here honing his skills as a discerning, evaluative reader and, via the act of translation, embedding these readings in the nature of the creative act itself (Waisman 59-63, 70-73). Focusing, then, not on the traditional question of whether or not Borges ever makes a "mistake" in his translation but on the particular reading strategies and lines of interpretation that he employs in bringing the Faulkner novel to life in Spanish, first in his mind and then in his translation, we have selected the following five categories for close comparative consideration: structure, style, subject matter, characterization and the role of the reader. By examining passages from each of these categories we can see the logic of Borges's translation decisions and thus more accurately assess the contribution that his translation of the Faulkner text makes to his new theory about the crucial role that reading plays in literature.

Form and Structure

Overall, we can see that in his translation Borges is faithful to the self-interrogating macrostructure that is so integral to Faulkner's original text. He maintains the same form, for example, of the two entwining stories ("The Wild Palms" and "Old Man") that together constitute a ten-narrative sequence in the same alternating order as the original ("The Wild Palms," "Old Man," "The Wild Palms," "Old Man," etc.). As in the original, Borges does not offer numerical chapter divisions and, again as in the original, he does not soften or compromise the abrupt transitions between chapters. Borges, moreover, remains true to the Faulknerian technique of mentioning, or alluding to, a piece of information that remains mysterious and unexplained until much later in

the story, the reader being called upon constantly to remember what she reads (but understands imperfectly) until she can put it together with information that she learns, and reinterprets, later in the story. And, finally, as in *The Wild Palms*, only gradually does the (attentive) reader of *Las palmeras salvajes* come to realize how profoundly the two tales reflect and comment on each other, ending, finally, in an "antithetical parallelism" (Waggoner 140). The translation moves forward and backward in time and from one locale to another just as the original does, with the Spanish reader experiencing the same kind of spatial and temporal dislocation that characterizes the original. Further refined by Borges, these qualities, too, would become distinguishing characteristics of the stories and novels written by the "Boom" writers of the 1950s and 1960s, from Juan Rulfo's spare 1956 masterpiece, *Pedro Páramo*, to Gabriel García Márquez's intricate and influential epic, *Cien años de soledad* (1967). When read together, we see that the real appeal of the two entwined narratives in *The Wild Palms* lies in their ironic and contrapuntal relationship as reader-centered texts, not their grounding in some specific sociopolitical context (though, of course, these do exist and play roles, more so for Faulkner but also for Borges).[6] This concern with literature's existence as a verbal construct would have been important for Borges because it illustrated, much as Edgar Allan Poe's earlier *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) had also suggested to him (and at about the same time), that the true reality of fiction resides, first and foremost, in its status as a largely self-referential verbal artifice, or *ficción*, and not, as had historically been understood, in representational and mimetic terms.[7] Faulkner's first chapter, "The Wild Palms," thus becomes, for Borges, "Palmeras Salvajes," while Faulkner's second chapter, "Old Man," becomes "El Viejo." Like Faulkner, Borges demands a great deal of effort from the reader, whose active engagement with the text will determine what it is about and what meaning can be extrapolated from it.

Yet while we can say with confidence that the Borges translation is faithful to the overall structuring of *The Wild Palms*,[8] there are some notable exceptions, and these point to the way Borges was reading the Faulkner novel and how he envisioned he might improve it, particularly with respect to dramatic intensity, ironic intertextual commentary, and readerly involvement. With regard to this last issue, it is interesting to note that Borges, sensitive to what for his readers would have been the very different culture and language of the rural American South of the 1930s, elects to offer a note at the bottom of the first page of this chapter that explains to his Spanish reader the meaning of this reference: "Old Man: El Viejo: nombre familiar del río Misisipí (N. Del T.)" (29).[9]

[6] See Balderston, *Out of Context* 1-17.

[7] The Poe novel was favorably discussed by Borges in one of his most important critical essays, "El arte narrativo y la magia" ("Narrative Art and Magic"), which, along with the closely connected "La postulación de la realidad" ("The Postulation of Reality"), contends that there are really two kinds of narrative: the detailed realistic kind and the "magical" kind, in which (argued Borges) the tightness of the verbal structure itself was more rigorous and more desirable than any arbitrary description of reality could be. Both essays were published in the journal *Discusión* in 1932.

[8] See Bravo 11-12.

[9] Unless otherwise indicated, all textual examples from *Las palmeras salvajes* will be from the original 1940 Sudamérica edition.

Borges also does not hesitate to break up long sections of the original into new paragraphs, as he does, for example, in the fifth and final section of "The Wild Palms."[10] Where Faulkner offers an extended description of the hospital into which Charlotte has been admitted and the gurney on which she was being transported, Borges sees the need for a new paragraph break, one that, in his carefully read version, more sharply dramatizes the distinction between the two winds, the hot and the cool, that are here being contrasted and that carry such symbolic power (*WP* 257; *PS* 327). And by omitting the reference to "the black sand it [the hot wind] had blown over," Borges also clarifies Faulkner's image a bit though he is forced to give up something of the original's power in doing so. Borges, apparently still keying on the drama inherent in this scene, also decides to alter its original paragraphing as it comes to an end, once again seeking to intensify the scene's drama (*WP* 257; *PS* 328-29). And, as if deciding who is the more important character here, Borges then omits two sentences, "He could hear it for a moment longer. Then he could not," in favor of following the newly set off "Luego ya no," opting for a continuation of the emphasis on the nurse, as opposed to the man (as in the original), and, decisively, for a shift from passive to active voice: "La enfermera estiró el brazo hasta la pared, sonó un botón y cesó el zumbido del ventilador" ("The nurse reached her hand to the wall, a button clicked and the hum of the blower stopped" [*PS* 329; *WP* 258]).

Crucially, as Kristal points out, Borges "fully endorsed the view that a translator could reshape and improve an original," especially if he felt his decision would accentuate some aspect of the original text that he felt needed to be highlighted, downplayed, rearranged, or even eliminated (31). For Borges, then, "a faithful translation . . . retains the meanings 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" (Kristal, *Invisible Work* 32-33). Toward the end of the first section of "Old Man," for example, Borges creates a paragraph where Faulkner had none, and in the process accentuates the change in fortune buried in the original's form, and the result, once again, is both a "re-creation" and an intensification of the original's "meanings and effects" (*WP* 26; *PS* 36).

This section is also instructive because it shows how, on this question of literalism, Borges felt quite free to alter the original's syntax in order to produce a translated version that retained the original's sense most faithfully by using the laws of Spanish syntax to do so. It is true that Borges loses something by rendering the phrase, "the living unspoken thought among them" as "lo que pensaban y no decían" (literally "what they were thinking and not saying"), but, on balance, one feels that the Borges version captures the conflicted essence of the Faulkner original and that it does so without making the Spanish

[10]In the first paragraph of the fifth section of "Old Man," for example, when the primitive forces of the universe are contrasted with the mores of civilization, Borges sees a need to break Faulkner's long opening discourse into two closely connected sections, with the second one, containing the references to the pregnant woman, the power of the river's current, the snakes, and the deer, emphasizing the potency of the natural world.

translation sound, or read, either more or less idiosyncratically than Faulkner's English; different, yes, but in similar ways (*WP* 26; *PS* 36).[11] If the unique sound of the Faulknerian voice is not preserved, Borges retains the meaning quite successfully.

Perhaps the most striking example, however, of Borges's penchant for changing the structure and presentation of Faulkner's novel comes in "The Wild Palms," when a timid and querulous Wilbourne attempts to come to grips with the fact that his stronger and more assertive companion, Charlotte, is leading him to perform an illegal abortion, an act repugnant to him, and an act which, for Borges (who has described himself as being "old fashioned" and "quite Victorian" in outlook [Di Giovanni, Halpern, and MacShane 107]), was apparently so unsavory that its presence in the novel led him to make a series of strategic decisions about how it should be handled in the translation:

> "So there's just one thing left," he said, aloud. . . . "We can do it, we must do it; I will find something, anything. —Yes!" he thought, cried aloud into the immaculate desolation, with harsh and terrible sardonicism, "I will set up as a professional abortionist." Then he would return to the cabin. (*WP* 175)

For Borges, always conscious of the power dramatic structuring possesses, the translation of this section required two crucial changes, one involving the section's paragraphing and the other the degree of emphasis given to what Borges felt was the decisive utterance:

> —Sólo queda una cosa —dijo en alta voz, en una especie de serenidad. . . . Podemos hacerlo, debemos hacerlo. Encontraré algo, cualquier cosa. *Sí!* —pensaba, gritaba en la desolación inmaculada, con áspera y terrible ironía—: *me instalaré como especialista en abortos.*
>
> Entonces volvía a la cabaña. (*PS* 226)

By breaking this passage up into two sections, and by ending the first section with Wilbourne's declaration (one that in the original makes him seem more pathetic than tragic), Borges effectively emphasizes this turning point in Wilbourne's development as a character, a man (a doctor) so totally subservient to Charlotte, a married woman and his much more dominant paramour, that he will do something that he believes is wrong. But because Borges's reading of this section apparently keys on the shocking quality of the man's declaration, his translation of it must make Wilbourne's decision to become an abortionist not only the most salient feature of the entire scene but its most eye catching as well. This, apparently, is why Borges elects to write it in italics and to conclude this dramatic moment with this particular line.[12]

[11]In "The Ear in Translation," Rabassa argues that good translation is often not only an issue of grammar, syntax, and diction but also of how it "sounds," how natural the translation seems to a native speaker of the "into" language. On occasion, Rabassa reminds us, a translator has to step away from grammatical fidelity and toward a bit of stylistic invention in order to remain most faithful to the original text.

[12]Borges repeats this tactic in the fourth section of "The Wild Palms," where he also modifies the original's paragraph structure, breaking a long Faulkner section into two parts and, once again making use of italics, intensifying the scene's essential point, which deals with the increasingly sharp contrast between the psychology of Charlotte and that of Wilbourne (*WP* 186; *PS* 239-40).

Style

If structuring is generally a success story for the Borges translation, his struggle with the intensely regional diction of *The Wild Palms* is more fraught with problems, not to the point of failure but, more importantly, in ways that highlight the linguistic differences between English and Spanish, their respective strengths and weaknesses. In the opening line of the passage just cited, for example, Faulkner, in a line bristling with problems for the reader/translator, writes, "'I reckon that means it [the levee] will bust tonight,' one convict said" (*WP* 26). Borges translates this seemingly simple but, for the translator, very complicated utterance by writing, "—Eso quiere decir que van a reventar esta noche—dijo uno de los penados" (*PS* 36). By beginning not with the voice of the, at best, semiliterate convict but with the much more neutered "Eso quiere decir" ("That means it"), Borges seems to admit the impossibility of finding even an approximate Spanish equivalent for "I reckon," a verb use that here, as elsewhere in the novel, has a great deal to do with characterization. Then, too, the convict's use of the common but substandard "bust," rather than the more correct, and formal, "burst," cannot be re-created in Spanish, which points to some degree of tonal loss in the translation. And, by changing from the very specific singular of Faulkner's "it [the levee]" to the plural of "van a reventar" ("they are/they're going to burst"), Borges slightly alters the exact point, or focus, of the sentence, electing to call the reader's attention not to the specific levee referred to by the convict but to the larger question of the levees in general, which was, in fact, the point of the utterance that preceded this one: "*Crest Now Below Memphis. 22,000 Refugees Safe at Vicksburg. Army Engineers Say Levees Will Hold*" (*WP* 26).

Diction issues also surface in Borges's decision to allow such terms as "gumbo," "ginger ale," "dump," "boy scout," "overalls," "chewing-gum," "cow-boys," and "hall" to remain in English, though another term, "Cajan," comes across as "isleño," a word more traditionally understood in Spanish as "islander," or "of the islands" (especially the Canaries). Borges seems to use in his translation as "outsider" or "other," one who, by dint of speech and dress, is "insular" to the point of strangeness, demonstrably different, even alienated, from the others. In this respect, moreover, it could be argued that Borges's choice of "isleño" for "Cajan" is actually a brilliant decision because, as in Faulkner's original usage (where the convict's inability to understand the Cajan's language is critical), his reading (and translation) of this section of the novel focuses squarely on the essential problem being examined here, that of difference and the problems of human communication that derive from it. Further, it is noteworthy that Borges, considering his readers' awareness of the powerful cultural distinctions that are involved here, apparently does not feel the need to explain "Cajan" in a footnote, as he does with "Old Man" and "Andrew Jackson" (*PS* 296). Indeed, he seems to feel that in Spanish, "isleño" conveys approximately the same sets of differentiating cultural markers and semantic vibrations that "Cajan" does in English, and that context will allow his readers to understand its use here (Vickery 159).

While most, if not all, these terms likely would have been understood by educated Spanish language readers in 1940, a more problematic example is the word "moccasin," from the fifth section of "Old Man." A kind of poisonous snake common to the bayous and waterways of the South, the moccasin is the specific kind of serpent the convict and his pregnant female charge encounter as they battle the swiftly rising waters of the Mississippi River during the great flood of 1927. Later in the same section, Faulkner's convict speaks again about another moccasin but this time refers to it merely as "*just another snake*" (*WP* 193). In both instances, however, and in all subsequent references to this particular animal, Borges translates the word "moccasin" as "serpiente," a tactic which, owing to the Latin roots of both Spanish and English and alluding to the danger lurking within the Garden of Eden, serves him well with "serpent" but not so well with "moccasin," an Indian word which, in the Faulkner text, resonates with tremendous regional specificity and mythic intensity (*PS* 247, 249).[13] And in the famous line where Faulkner has one of his characters appear to allude, in the process of making a rather bizarre toast, to Ernest Hemingway, "'Yah,' McCord said. 'Set, ye armourous sons, in a sea of hemingwaves,'" Borges writes: " —Sí —dijo Mc Cord. *Drink up, ye armourous sons in a sea of hemingwaves*" (*WP* 82; *PS* 110). Borges not only highlights the Hemingway reference by using italics, he also provides the entire allusion with an explanatory note (something not found in the original): "*Retruécanos* más bien intraducibles a la manera de James Joyce.[14] *Armourous = Armour + amorous; hemingwaves = waves* + Hemingway" (*PS* 110). Then, too, the slangy "Yah" that opens the utterance loses something in its translation as "sí," which, though semantically correct enough, fails to develop the speaker's character as effectively as the original does. The difference between "yah" and "yes" in American English does not come through in the Spanish "sí," and the loss, though slight, is significant in terms of characterization and tone.

A much more serious problem of the same basic type is Borges's translation of "nigger," a term both common to and essential to Faulkner's text (given its time, place, and characterizations) and a word widely regarded as explosively offensive in terms of its connotations and usages. In the fourth section of "The Wild Palms," for example, Faulkner has his hapless male protagonist say, "'Oh . . . I see now. Yes. So they smelled it. Like niggers do,'" a line which Borges, hewing closely to the original's syntax but lacking a Spanish equivalent for "nigger," is forced to translate as "—Ah! . . . Ya entiendo. Sí. Lo olfatearon. Como los negros (*WP* 158; *PS* 205). Interestingly, the problem of translating racial and ethnic slurs continues, with Borges rendering "wops" as "gringos,"

[13] Another animal, less central to the story's mythic intensity, is the "muskrat," which Borges rather creatively translates as "castor," the Spanish word normally used to mean "beaver" (*WP* 219; *PS* 281). Borges also translates "sorghum" as "caña dulce," a term more commonly used to denote "sugar cane" (*WP* 281; *PS* 358). The modern Spanish word for sorghum, "sorgo," may well not have existed in 1939, and thus not have been available to Borges. It is also interesting to note that whereas Faulkner repeats the word, *sorghum* (which he also emphasizes by writing it in italics), Borges elects to delete it (*WP* 281; *PS* 358). In this same scene, Borges also translates a particular 1930s piece of farm equipment, the "shovel plow," as "arado," or, simply, "plow" (*WP* 281; *PS* 358). And "Shit," at one point becomes "Demonio!" (*WP* 86; *PS* 115).

[14] Borges makes use of explanatory notes at several points in his translation.

"hunkies" as "polacos," and "chinks" as "chinos," all of which lose a good bi of their emotive force in Borges's semantically accurate translation (*WP* 157- 58; *PS* 204-05). The problem here is that the reader responds to a text no merely intellectually but emotionally as well, and it is in this latter context tha the loss occurs.

Diction was not the only stylistic problem that Borges faced as he sough to transform Faulkner's text into modern Spanish. Syntax, profoundly tie both to a language's musicality and to its ability to generate meaning, and no toriously difficult for the translator to handle, also presented him with som daunting challenges. Ranging from the violent to the lushly lyrical, the poetr of Faulkner's writing stems consistently from his syntactic modulations, a tac tic that was not lost on Borges, who was himself experimenting at the tim with similar narrative innovations (Monegal 372-73). For example, in the fina section of "The Wild Palms," which contains much of the novel's most intens and compelling writing, a Faulkner character tells a now despairing Wilbourn an extraordinary story about a sawmill worker who is badly cut in the violenc that erupts at a crap game but who is subsequently saved by a skilled doctor thus implying that Charlotte, too, will survive the damage done to her (*WP* 253). Borges, carefully tracking, as a reader, each shift in voice, tone, register and rhythm, and keenly aware of the ironically parallel significance that this story possesses, deftly counters with a Spanish equivalent that, allowing fo grammatical impossibilities, rings remarkably close and true to the spirit of the original (*PS* 323).[15]

An example of the roiling, free association-like sentence that Faulkner could spin so effectively (and that would later influence the work of such writ- ers as García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, and José Donoso) comes from the third section of "Old Man," which, stylistically speaking, also ranks as one of the novel's most convincing chapters. With respect to sentence length and com- plexity and the problems these pose for the translator (who works within the stylistic confines and traditions of a different literary culture), Borges him- self has noted that after the translation of *The Wild Palms* appeared he was "blamed" for writing sentences that "were far too involved," as if failing to re- produce a foreign writer's distinctive syntax could be regarded as a translation virtue (Di Giovanni, Halpern, and MacShane 136).[16] Describing the convict's heroic battle with the raging flood waters and, thus, with the ancient forces of the natural world, Faulkner writes, "the skiff, travelling at express speed, was in a seething gut between soaring and dizzy banks" and "in a final paroxysm, re- gurgitated him onto the wild bosom of the Father of Waters" (*WP* 133-34).[17]

[15]"Cálmese, la van a salvar. Es el doctor Richardson en persona. Harátres años trajeron un negro de un aserradero donde alguien le había atravesado los intestinos con una navaja en un juego de dados. Bueno ¿qué hizo el doctor Richardson? Lo abrió, lo cortó las tripas que no servian, pegó las dos puntas como quien vulcaniza un tubo de goma, y el negro ya está en su trabajo."

[16]Kodama comments on Borges's sensitivity, as a reader, writer, and translator, to issues of style, most especially the importance of syntax, often regarded by professional translators as the most volatile of the stylistic elements.

[17]Interestingly, and in contrast to what Faulkner does, Borges elects not to break up the long passage of which this quotation is a part (*WP* 133-34; *PS* 172-75).

Borges, reproducing here the spirit, if not always the letter, of Faulkner's distinctive syntax, in which clauses seem to proliferate from other clauses and where even the attentive reader finds herself increasingly uncertain as to what subject or verb these relate to, also captures his quicksilver rhythm patterns and the sense of wild motion that characterizes this scene: "el esquife navegando a una velocidad de expreso estaba en una entraña hirviente entre tablas levantadas y vertiginosas" and "lo vomitó en un paroxismo final, al agitado pecho del Padre de las Aguas" (*PS* 175).[18] Both in Faulkner's English and in Borges's Spanish, the reader, like the convict in his boat being whipped around by the currents, is lost in a torrent of words, forced to navigate a number of possible meanings and to plumb a variety of complex relationships and structures, all of which make reasonable sense but only some of which will lead to a sense of security or satisfaction.

Closely linked to both diction and syntax, and very much a function of these, tone also ranks as one of the most elusive qualities a translator must deal with. Because *The Wild Palms* contains a number of tonal shifts, the reader, even in English, must be very alert and pay close attention not merely to what is said but also to what is implied, often ironically so. And, as his translation proves, Borges once again demonstrates to us his excellence as a reader and his ability to transform the reactions he gets from his reading into another text, similar to the original yet different from it, just as a melody played by one instrument sounds different when it is played by another instrument. Humorous sections in *The Wild Palms*, for example, appear in basically two categories, the situational and the verbal. There are numerous instances of both, and the alert, engaged reader often senses a wryly humorous tone emerging unexpectedly from the text. One such case, representing the situational category and explaining the circumstances under which the convict commits his crime, comes from the opening lines of the first section of "Old Man": "Once . . . there were two convicts. One of them . . . was in for fifteen years . . . for attempted train robbery," a plan, the reader quickly learns, the convict had put together after reading pulp fiction "paper novels—the Diamond Dicks and Jesse Jameses and such" and believing everything that appeared in them (*WP* 20-21).[19] Borges, well versed in the traditions of Plato (for whom the "lies" of the poets made them a threat to the Republic), *Don Quixote*, and *Madame Bovary*, would have been familiar with this authorial gambit and so would have been able to translate it quite faithfully, as, indeed, he does, including, even, the fable-like tone that opens this section: "Una vez . . . había dos penados. Uno de ellos. . . . Estaba condenado a quince años . . . por conato de robo en un tren" (*PS* 29, 30). In order to reference, in a culturally meaningful way, these popular paperback novels for his Spanish-speaking readers, Borges here makes use of an explanatory

[18]See Díaz-Diocaretz 32.

[19]Another case appears later in the novel, where we are told about how a man who escapes a falling safe is then struck by the "two-ounce paper weight which was sitting on it," the irony of which Borges neatly catches in his translation (*WP* 196; *PS* 252).

footnote: "Léase los Juan Moreira, los Hormiga Negra, etc.," citing example of popular Argentinean fiction that corresponded, more or less, to the kinds of American novels to which the young convict had so gullibly fallen prey (*PS* 29). Later, in an example of verbal humor, Faulkner plays with a confusion over the words "hemophiliac" and "hermaphrodite," a confusion that Borges mimics in a tonally near-perfect exchange (*WP* 203; *PS* 260).[20] Although in handling this scene Borges continues to have to make allowances for "aint," although he loses some zip with his rendering of "Plenty of life in the old carcass," and although he misses or elects not to designate the convict in question as "tall," his translation does catch the verbal confusion that characterizes this comical scene in Faulkner's original (*WP* 203).

Something similar occurs with respect to Borges's handling of a disparaging remark that the character McCord makes to Wilbourne: "Yah, you're a hell of a guy. You haven't even got the courage of your fornications, have you?" Borges translates this as "Eres un rico tipo. No tienes siquiera el valor de tus fornicaciones" (*WP* 86; *PS* 115). While the first part of this line, a common expression in English, comes across for Borges in a way that, while not at all literal, does find a solid, culturally significant equivalent in Spanish, the second part, slightly more so but, in the main, playing on the old cliché about the need for one to have the courage of one's convictions, emerges as risible in both English and Spanish, and for the same reasons. As a reader, Borges is clearly tuned in to the many, often humorous, tonal changes at work in Faulkner's text, with the result that his translation comes alive, tonally speaking, just as Faulkner's original does.

Imagery, too, is an area where the Borges translation excels. In "Old Man," for example, the edenic imagery that drives the story casts the convict as an ironic Adam, a man who can scarcely comprehend what is happening to him or why, as he finally finds refuge "upon that quarter-acre mound, that earthen ark out of Genesis" (*WP* 194). Well-informed about such biblical imagery and traditions, and himself a sophisticated ironist, Borges follows Faulkner step for step here, clearly aware of the effect this scene must produce on its reader. As a result, his convict, too, finds himself "refugiado sobre esas pocas varas cuadradas de terraplén, esa Arca terrestre salida del Génesis" (*PS* 250). Again not missing or underestimating any detail or symbol, Borges transforms the controlling images of "The Wild Palms"—the tree itself and the black wind that, at the end, so mysteriously lashes it in a "sudden frenzied clashing" ("repentino furioso")—building these, along with the other symbols and motifs into his narrative so that their functions and impacts mirror the effect in the original (*WP* 258; *PS* 329).

As Juan Benet has pointed out, the most beguiling aspects of *The Wild Palms* stem from its best metaphoric moments, a feature of the original that Borges does not fail to capture (14-20). When, for example, the reader, who is privy to Wilbourne's stream of consciousness, learns about how much what

[20]Earlier, Faulkner had toyed with the word, "androgynous," the humor of which Borges also catches and adroitly transforms (*WP* 109-10; *PS* 145).

we read affects us as we live out our lives "*beneath the red and yellow drift of the waning year, the myriad kissing of the repeated leaves,*" Borges, reproducing not only the beauty of the imagery here, but also its complex sentiment, counters with "*bajo la roja y amarilla caída del año declinante, bajo el innumerable besarse de las hojas repetidas,*" a transformation that, as was characteristic of his translations, subtly enhances the original's evocative power (*WP* 88; *PS* 117; Kristal, *Invisible Work* 31).

Borges's skill at capitalizing on Faulkner's own lyricism is clearly in evidence, as well, in this passage from "Old Man":

> It was raining steadily now though still not hard, still without passion, the sky, the day itself dissolving without grief; the skiff moved in a nimbus, an aura of gray gauze which merged almost without demarcation with the roiling spittle-frothed debris-choked water. (*WP* 130)

Unable, of course, to reproduce the exact English sounds that generate the music of this line (sound in poetry being always a function of the particular language in which it is written), Borges, a superb and very influential poet himself, wisely elects here not to go for a literal transformation, which would be impossible, but for a poetic re-creation in Spanish that, having on its reader basically the same phonetic and semantic impact that the original has on its reader, is fired by a parallel lyricism and rhythm: "Ahora llovía seguido aunque no fuerte, todavía sin pasión el cielo, el día disolviéndose sin pena, el esquife se movía en un nimbo, un aura de gasa gris que se confundía casi sin límite con la revuelta agua espumosa, atascada de basura" (*PS* 171).

Theme and Content

Another thorny problem that Borges faces, as reader and translator of *The Wild Palms*, is how he will re-create the sometimes sensationalistic content of the novel, specifically the electrically charged and not infrequently elliptical language that Faulkner relies upon to describe the unexpected pregnancy of Charlotte, the dominant character in "The Wild Palms," and what happens because of it. The question is important because Charlotte's condition relates not only to a parallel condition of the woman in "Old Man" but to several other features of her own story, and if Borges were to err with his translation (or his reading) of the language that carries and conveys Charlotte's pregnancy, much of what is most compelling about the two tales would be lost or obscured. While the unnamed woman in "Old Man" gives birth, Charlotte, with her fatally exaggerated devotion to self-immolating "love," dies from the complications resulting from a botched abortion. For Borges, the translation problem, which begins with the novel's opening pages, when the reader is still uncertain as to what is happening and why, becomes all but intractable in the fourth section of "The Wild Palms," when Charlotte and Mrs. Buckner are discussing the many complications women face with respect to the conditions of pregnancy and marriage:

"Make him marry you."
"Maybe I will," Charlotte said.
"You make him. It's better that way. Especially when you get jammed."
"Are you jammed?"
"Yes. About a month." (*WP* 151)

Borges interprets and re-creates this key exchange in the following, structurally parallel fashion:

—Haga que se case con usted.
—Puede ser que lo haga —dijo Carlota.
—Hágalo. Es mejor así. Especialmente cuando estén peleados.
—Y ustedes están peleados?
—Sí. Hace como un mes. (*PS* 196)

Aside from Borges's very imaginative handling of "jammed" (which English speakers of the time would have recognized as slang for "pregnant," or "knocked up") as "están peleados," a plural past participle that one would not normally expect to find in a Spanish utterance and that shifts the focus from the woman to the couple, what is most interesting here, from the perspective of Borges's reading of this dialogue, is that while he translates the first two usages of "you" as the singular (and formal) "usted," he then changes his line of interpretation so that the third "you"—"Are you jammed?"—is unambiguously plural (and in the first instance, "estén," present subjunctive as well, *perforce* the rules of Spanish grammar), whereas in Faulkner's original the issue of number is much more ambiguous, though given the subject matter and context of the conversation, one feels that the singular form of "you" represents Faulkner's intention throughout the exchange.[21] It is also possible that, by putting the onus of the pregnancy on both the woman and the man (as opposed to the woman alone), this is another case where Borges felt obliged to avoid what he, or his mother (who often assisted him with his translations), might have regarded as an indecent or indiscreet line (Kristal, *Invisible Work* 41; Monegal 373).[22]

The problem of Charlotte's unwanted pregnancy continues to the end of this same section, where her companion, Wilbourne, says, in response to a question about why his face is injured, "Fight . . . I knocked up my girl. I want

[21] As evidence of Borges's skill and perceptivity as a reader, we point to a variant of "jammed up." "get in a jam," which Faulkner makes use of late in the novel to describe the agitated state in which one of his characters finds himself: "'Come on here,' the officer said. 'Sit down before you get yourself in a jam something'" (*WP* 253). Borges, ever alert that the same words can convey different meaning in differe situations, translates this line as: "—Vamos —dijo el oficial—. Siéntese antes que le dé un ataque o algo which suggests that he interprets "get yourself in a jam" as something a bit more specific, such as "you'll ha a heart attack or something" (*PS* 322).

[22] Two similar acts of bowdlerization, one perpetrated by Faulkner's original publisher, the other orchestrated by Borges himself, also pertain to this novel. As Noel Polk notes, Faulkner's own typescript sho that he had originally intended the final line of *The Wild Palms* to be "Women, shit," which, in the novel first printing, the editor, apparently concerned about the vulgarity of the word, "shit," changed the convict utterance to read: "Women, ____!" (*WP* 289-90). Following suit, but once again employing the ellipsis, t original 1940 Borges translation has this for its final line: "—Mujeres! . . . —dijo el penado also" (*PS* 365 Oddly enough, however, the same editor apparently missed an earlier reference in Faulkner's book abo "*males and females but without the pricks or cunts*," which Borges renders as "*machos y hembras pero sin sexo* an accurate enough if considerably laundered translation (*WP* 45; *PS* 61).

something for it," which Borges, perhaps stumbling on the exact meaning of the English slang term employed here, translates as "[u]na pelea. Le pegué a mi mujer. La he embarazado. Quiero algo para eso" (*WP* 180; *PS* 233). Beyond the question of why Borges added the line, "Le pegué a mi mujer" ("I hit my wife/woman"), which, of course, does not appear in the original (hence the possibility that Borges may have misunderstood the idea expressed by "I knocked up my girl"), Borges also renders the idea of "knocked up," which implies an unwanted pregnancy for an unmarried woman, with the standard Spanish verb that merely expresses the condition of being pregnant. Because "estar embarazada" conveys no necessary suggestion of impropriety, as the English phrase does, it seems that Borges may here have made a slip, though not one that severely affects the story's plot development.

This issue comes to a head shortly thereafter, when, as she boils the instruments, Charlotte prepares her trembling and conflicted lover, Wilbourne, to perform the abortion:

"Charlotte," he said. "Charlotte."
"It's all right. We know how. What was it you told me nigger women say? Ride me down, Harry." (*WP* 186)

Borges, again following closely, offers this as his interpretation:

—Carlota —dijo él— , Carlota . . .
—Está bien. Ya sabemos cómo. Qué me contaste que decían las negras? Líbrame, Harry. (*PS* 239)

Again, Spanish has no equivalent form for "ride me down," understood in this particular context, and, as a result, Borges, ever the imaginative reader and the inventive writer (his use of the ellipsis, for example, enhances the line's inherent drama by drawing the reader deeper into a contemplation of the conflict), elects to go for semantic clarity in his translation rather than for any kind of unnatural linguistic invention, which would likely have confused his readers more than it would have enlightened or engaged them. Ambiguity is one thing, confusion another, and the good translator does not accept the latter, even when unsuccessfully seeking the former. As a result, "ride me down" becomes, for Borges, the very sensible "Líbrame," which might be translated literally as "Free me up"or "set me free," which conveys, if not the poetry of Faulkner's line, then certainly its intent.[23]

Although the problem of the abortion, as we know, led Borges to excise many of the textual references to it, with the result that a number of Faulkner passages have been truncated, certain other sexually related references were deleted as well (Kristal, *Invisible Work* 185n73). For example, in the third section of "The Wild Palms," the character McCord says, "Sweet Jesus. . . . Holy choriated cherubim. If

[23] It is worth noting that at this particular juncture in the narrative, when the botched abortion is about to take place (thus causing the death of Charlotte), Borges apparently felt that the sense of drama and tension was so strong that, as the re-creator of the Faulkner text, he needed to set it off from the next line (in contrast to Faulkner, who does not set it off), which he does with a double spacing.

I am ever unlucky enough to have a son, I'm going to take him to a nice clean whore-house myself on his tenth birthday" (*WP* 118).[24] Borges, in reading this line and in translating the first part in a fairly literal fashion, elects to omit the latter half of this utterance, the whore-house reference: "—Dulce Jesús —dijo Mc Cord—. Dulces querubines. Si tengo la desgracia de tener un hijo—" (*PS* 155). By ending with the ellipsis, Borges avoids reproducing what may have been, for him, an unpleasant or superfluous reference and yet is able to maintain, and even heighten, the reader's involvement in the text. The ellipsis is like an open window through which she peers into the possible meanings and implications that are lying dormant in the text waiting to be activated by the imaginative and creative process that is reading.

Later in this same section, Faulkner offers his reader the infamous and ludicrous scene of the first frozen and then exploding douche bag, a scene which, in Faulkner's text, relates directly (if, given her nature, rather incredulously) to Charlotte's becoming pregnant and, thus, to the story's plot structure (*WP* 172). Borges, however, apparently deciding to allow his reader to supply what, in his version, will be this missing tidbit of information, eliminates entirely the reference to the douche bag (*PS* 223). Almost immediately, Borges then makes another elision, "the seed got burned up in the love, the passion," an allusion that, in Faulkner's text, smacks of a very destructive sexual intensity but one that Borges feels is not needed or desired (*WP* 172). By making these cuts, Borges mitigates the sexual violence inherent in Faulkner's tale and, at the same time, focuses the reader's attention on the tragic failure of the love being depicted here while once again avoiding any complicating reference to the douche bag, which, as we have seen, Borges deems less necessary to the integrity of the novel than Faulkner does (*PS* 223).

Several more deletions occur toward the end of this section of "The Wild Palms," most of which relate in one way or another to issues of sex.[25] One of these is a section in which, along with the issue of the abortion, the specter of incest is also raised while another addresses the commercialization of abortions, infidelity, anger, and rape (*WP* 184-85; *PS* 237).

> "You bastard! You damned bastard! So you can rape little girls in parks on Saturday afternoons!" She came and snatched the cap from his head and hurled it into the fireplace . . . and then clung to him, crying hard, the hard tears springing and streaming. "You bastard, you damned bastard, you damned damned damned—"
>
> She boiled the water herself and fetched out the meagre instruments. (*WP* 185)

[24]Juan Benet reports that this paragraph was also "censorado" in the 1944 Argentine edition (13).

[25]One that does not refer to sex is Faulkner's reference to the uniform of a WPA school crossing guard: "And even then he did not enter but stood instead in the opening with on his head a cheap white bellows-topped peaked cap with a yellow band—the solitary insigne of a rankless WPA school crossing guard—and his heart cold and still with a grief and despair that was almost peaceful" (*WP* 185). Borges, perhaps not understanding the reference to the WPA school crossing guard uniform, or perhaps not judging it to be useful in terms of the artistic development of Faulkner's piece, leaves it out: "Y aún hacerlo no entró: se quedó en un umbral con un barato gorro blanco de picos con una cintilla amarilla—la solitaria insignia de un celador—y con el corazón quieto y helado por una pena y desesperación que eran casi sedantes" (*PS* 238).

Borges elects to edit these passages, omitting several items and changing the scene's structuring so that the emphasis stays on the conflict that Borges reads as most essential (*PS* 238). While one could argue that Faulkner's "hard tears" loses something here in Borges's translation as "lágrimas tristes," the more notable loss surely must be Faulkner's suggestion that Wilbourne will rape little girls on Saturday afternoons, a reference that, while perhaps offensive to Borges (and in his view, unnecessary as well on artistic grounds, this being the more important consideration for Borges [Kristal, *Invisible Work* 28-30]), also enhances the characterization of Charlotte, whom Faulkner casts throughout in a none-too-favorable light.

Borges's deletion of this type of material in his translation comes to something of a climax when Faulkner has Charlotte, who has just boiled the "meagre instruments" with which he of the trembling hands will soon perform her abortion, speak about the knives that will be involved (*WP* 185-86). Borges accepts all of Faulkner's description save the reference to knives, which, in terms of its exact meaning, is none too clear in the original text, and so it could be argued that here Borges, true to his ideas about translation, has determined to delete what he judges to be the nonessential material and thus sharpen what he feels is the primary focus of this scene, which, in his view, deals with Charlotte's manipulation of the hapless Wilbourne (Kristal, *Invisible Work* 30-31, 41; *PS* 239).

Characterization

The category of characterization, which is so essential to a successful narrative and which depends so heavily on description, point of view, and dialogue, must, with only one small cavil, be regarded as another major area of success for Borges in his translation of *The Wild Palms*. By paying close attention to the ways Faulkner uses diction, tone, and register to develop his characters, by hewing closely to Faulkner's original structure (both between the stories and within them), and, with only a few exceptions, by replicating Faulkner's use of italics (which serves to distinguish between language spoken and thought), Borges manages, as Faulkner does, to harness the evocative power of language to the development of his characters. As a reader and as a writer (and especially as a writer seeking to create a "new narrative"), Borges understood, as Faulkner clearly did, that language is the novel form's true reality. Because both writers judged characterization to be essentially a function of language, it is not surprising that Borges, as careful and discerning a reader as he was a careful and innovative writer, would have been so successful with this aspect of his translation of *The Wild Palms*.[26] By

[26]An example of a slip in this respect comes midway through the novel, when Wilbourne has a ginger ale instead of an alcoholic drink and excuses himself by employing a well-known American English expression, "I'm on the wagon" (*WP* 111). Unable to reproduce this particular usage in Spanish, Borges, who almost certainly would have known what the English meant, opts for the very precise if somewhat different "Soy abstemio," which, as per the grammatical rules of Spanish, points to a permanent aspect, or quality, of Wilbourne's identity; for him, as expressed in this form, abstemious behavior is not a temporary condition but a way of defining himself (*PS* 146). Linguistically, this question involves the ways the two Spanish verbs, "ser" and "estar" (both of which mean "to be") relate to the English "I'm" and what is meant by the context in which it is used.

reading Faulkner as sensitively as he does in English, he was able to reproduce Faulkner successfully in Spanish, not literally in the traditional sense of that term, but faithfully, which is what Borges felt a good reader and translator should always do.[27]

The one cavil that might be leveled against Borges with respect to his re-creations of Faulkner's characters is that at certain times they seem a bit flattened out, somewhat less vividly drawn than in the original. This is especially true, as we have seen, with respect to Charlotte, whose development as a character dominates the entire novel. On the other hand, her lover Wilbourne (whom Faulkner presents as being passive to the point of absurdity) is very successfully captured in the Borges translation, as is the nameless convict in "Old Man," who, after unexpectedly gaining his freedom, ironically chooses at the end to reject it in favor of continued incarceration. In considering the modes of characterization employed by Faulkner and the linguistic resources of Spanish that were available to Borges in rewriting these characters (for a very different culture, one in which the reception of Faulkner's artistic vision and certain of his thematic concerns would not be unproblematic), one feels that the essential problem with Borges's characterization of Charlotte is the ruinously romantic quality of her voice.[28] Thus, the difficulty Borges faced in developing "Carlota" as a character for his audience was both cultural and tonal in nature, with both these qualities being notoriously difficult for translators to handle successfully (Rabassa, "Words Cannot Express," 85-91). While both Wilbourne and Charlotte are developed as characters in terms of what they do (as is the case with the convict) and what they say, it is Charlotte who emerges with the most distinctive voice, the one that is most defined by its unmistakable register and tone. As a result, Charlotte, the character who comes alive vividly in Faulkner's high-octane English and who wears pants not "ladies' slacks but pants, man's pants" ("bombachas de señora, sino pantalones, pantalones de hombre"), emerges, in Borges's Spanish, as a slightly different presence, a cultural sign of a different type and, inevitably, carrying a somewhat different significance (*WP* 6; *PS* 10-11). When we first meet her in the first section of "The Wild Palms" (the section that also opens the novel), we see her through the eyes of a middle-aged doctor whom Wilbourne has contacted in an effort to save her life, which is threatened by something a hemorrhage, the cause of which the reader can only guess. What is most striking about this initial scene, however, is how consumed by an unspecified anger Charlotte seems to be. Described in terms of "queer hard yellow eyes" ("duros y raros ojos amarillos" [*WP* 5; *PS* 9]) and "blank feral eyes" ("vagos y feroces ojos" [*WP* 9; *PS* 15]) that exude a "profound and illimitable hatred" ("ilimitado y profundo odio" [*WP* 9; *PS* 15]), Charlotte is presented to the reader as a terrible enigma, one whose story, though hinting here at tragedy

[27]See Steiner 17-31, 296-333; Kristal, *Invisible Work* xiv-xvii; Alazraki 235-36; and Rabassa, *If This Is Treason* 8-9.

[28]The dominance of Charlotte as a female character, for example, and the issues of her abandonment of her husband and children, her aggressive sexuality, and her demand for an abortion (in contrast to Wilbourne, who opposed it).

will eventually emerge more as a case of pathetic self-delusion. As the doctor who is treating her observes, and as the reader is thus led to suspect, Charlotte's hatred seemed to be directed "[*n*]*ot at the race of mankind but at the race of man, the masculine*" ("*No al género humano sino al género masculino, al hombre*") for "[*s*]*omething which the entire race of men, males, has done to her or she believes has done to her*" ("*Algo que toda la raza de los hombres, de los machos le ha hecho, o ella cree que le ha hecho*"), a development that becomes increasingly complicated as Charlotte's story unfolds and that Borges faithfully tracks in his translation (*WP* 10, 11; *PS* 15, 17). If we read Wilbourne as more of a comic type, the feckless lover, than as a serious player in a tragic love affair (theirs seems more asinine than tragic), then in contrast, we read Charlotte not as a conventional type but as a very complex and tormented modern woman, the epitome in many ways of the kind of tangled female character that both Faulkner and Borges have long been said to have had trouble developing throughout their careers as writers.

This view of Charlotte seems to be summed up for the reader in the third section of "The Wild Palms," when, in reference to his lover (and to the thrall in which she holds him), Wilbourne muses, perhaps resignedly: "*Yes* he thought. . . . *I have been seduced to an imbecile's paradise by an old whore; I have been throttled and sapped of strength and volition by the old weary Lilith of the year*" (*WP* 97). Borges, not missing a beat here, and picking up on the telling biblical reference, translates in the following fashion: "*Sí*, pensó. . . . *He sido seducido a un imbécil paraíso por una vieja ramera; he sido sofocado y exhausto de fuerza y voluntad por la vieja fatigada Lilith del año*" (*PS* 129).

A good example of how, especially in his translation work with novels, Borges tends, whenever possible, toward a more literal version of the original,[29] this passage also conveys most accurately to the reader the true nature of both Wilbourne and Charlotte though the scale is tipped decisively toward Charlotte, and her tangled characterization, with the complicating identification of her with Lilith, the female demon who, in Semitic mythology, dwelled in deserted places (as Charlotte had done) and endangered children (Charlotte had abandoned hers) and who is often said to have been, before the creation of Eve, Adam's original wife. And, of course, if one applies the biblical story of the Garden of Eden to *The Wild Palms*, one sees instantly that just as Eve (as seductress) is traditionally thought (by some) to have brought down Adam, so, too, could one argue that it is Charlotte who brings down (the singularly nonheroic, non-Adamic) Wilbourne, an interpretation that will remind Borges scholars of one of his later stories, "La intrusa" ("The [female] Intruder"). In Charlotte's defense, however, it might also be argued that Wilbourne's demise has less to do with Charlotte, who is willing to sacrifice everything in her all-out pursuit of perfect, total love, than with the pathetic naiveté of Wilbourne himself. This sort of irony-charged cultural referencing on Faulkner's part, one replete here and in Borges's story with an edenic, or paradisiacal, grounding and leavened by the enduring power of myth and (for Faulkner) its problematic relation-

[29]See Bravo 11-12; Aparicio 118-25.

ship with our seemingly rudderless modern age, is precisely the sort of thing in which Borges reveled as a reader and at which he excelled in presenting as a writer, and so it is to be expected that he would catch this and transform it with depth, resonance, and fidelity in his translation. And he does, though it still seems that what Charlotte says and does represents an aesthetic and intellectual dilemma for him, one perhaps not resolved here (as it may not have been for Faulkner, either [Fowler vii-viii]) and one that would come to characterize the roles women play in much of his immensely influential work and in the work of the "Boom" writers (Payne and Fitz xi-xiv, 1-32).

In "Old Man," which deals primarily with people of a different, and lower, social class, Faulkner's characterization of the convict (el penado), whose perspective dominates the story, depends heavily on dialogue, on the kind of language he speaks and the way he speaks. Colorful, often nongrammatical, and not lacking in expletives, the language the convict speaks (and, to a lesser degree, the language Faulkner uses to characterize him) strongly marks him as a character. In this sense, his characterization, like that of Charlotte (both, though in different ways, are victims—he of pulp fiction, she of romantic notions about love), is very much a matter of a regionally specific, and distinctly oral, language use. This presents a problem for Borges, for as Rabassa has observed, regionalisms and curse words are quite likely the two greatest challenges a translator faces (Rabassa, "If This Be Treason" 34; "Words Cannot Express" 87-91).

A prime example of the problems that curse words pose for the translator comes from the first section of "The Wild Palms" when Charlotte, dying of the botched abortion, angrily says to Wilbourne, "Let me go, you bloody bungling bastard," which Borges renders as "Déjame ir, *guacho*, inútil del diablo!" (*WP* 17; *PS* 25). While his "déjame ir" nicely captures the sense and intimate tone of Faulkner's "Let me go," his choice of the "*guacho*" (which he apparently seeks to intensify by putting it in italics) makes use of a regional epithet of some severity ("bastard," or "son of a bitch"). The problem for Borges in using "*guacho*," a term that, in other contexts, can also refer to an abandoned child or dog, is that though the term and its accompanying insult ("inútil del diablo,"something like "you useless piece of shit") succeed in creating a very rhythmic and fluid line in Spanish, they cannot re-create the powerful alliteration of Faulkner's own anapest-driven line and thus suffer a loss in euphony if not meaning. As Bravo notes, however, the essential problem in this case is that the Faulkner curse simply has no close Spanish equivalent (12). As a result, Borges elects to create not a literal rewriting of Faulkner's line (which almost certainly would have sounded like denatured "translationese" in Spanish) but a parallel version of it, one that captures the spirit and cultural context of the original and that offers the reader, if not the identical rhythm of the original, a line that has its own music.[30] In other words, Borges recognizes the poetry of Faulkner's English language curse and transforms it into an analogous kind of poetry in Spanish just as when a band does a "cover" of someone else's tune.

[30]See Venuti, *Translator's Invisibility* 1-5, 16-17, 23; *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology* 2-6, 13; and *Scandals of Translation* 4-5, 6, 81-87.

Later, in "Old Man," as the convict battles to control his tiny boat in the raging flood waters of the Mississippi River, Faulkner puts the reader inside his unlettered mind. Unable, linguistically, to replicate "*durn*," "*get on back*," and "*being let to make it*," and, as we have seen, having no Spanish recourse for a line like "*I reckon I had done forgot*," Borges once again goes for clarity, which, under the circumstances, is undoubtedly his best move, since his character, who is not able to express himself in standard English, must at the same time be able to make himself understood, or intuited, by the reader, and this Borges achieves (*WP* 219; *PS* 280).

Still later in the same scene, when the convict realizes that the man who could help him is "*fixing to leave*" ("*Ha resuelto irse*"), he says, "I aint going without my boat," which Borges is forced to translate as the very correct "No me voy sin mi bote" (*WP* 223; *PS* 286; *WP* 227; *PS* 291). The loss, here and elsewhere in the text, of "aint," which cannot be reproduced in Spanish, takes some of the edge off the convict's development as a character, though, once again, the loss is minimal and does not mislead or confuse the reader.[31] Making a comparison of Spanish and English and of their potential for unconventional oral usages, Rabassa notes of this issue that

> You can't say 'ain't' or 'he don't' in Spanish. Solecisms are generally of an oral nature, matters of pronunciation and such. You can't say 'ain't,' but the most illiterate peasant uses the imperfect subjunctive perfectly. Since English is a much 'looser' language, grammatically, than Spanish, the translator has to find some middle ground in syntax so that the aforementioned peasant doesn't sound like an academician. (qtd. in Morales 125)

Borges, much to his credit, finds this "middle ground" in his transformation of the convict's dialect, and in the process, brings him as much to life for his Spanish-speaking audience as Faulkner's original character is alive for the English reader.

Faulkner and Borges bring this section to a conclusion in a way that showcases the inventive skill of both writers. Striving, with some slippage, to follow the distinction between "officer" and "deputy" that an educated English speaker would catch, Borges offers up the rather more formal "Usted es un funcionario," but returning to the problem of the expletive, he then finds himself compelled to have his deputy say "Ya lo verá" instead of the salty (and Southern) American English solecism, "You damn right I am" (*WP* 233). The point here, with respect to Borges's re-creations of Faulkner's linguistically fascinating characters, is not that they are exact copies, which they are not (and which they could not be), but that they are faithful to their models, as faithful as they could be in their status as verbal portraits in a different language system and for a different culture. What Borges

[31]Some other examples of this type of problem include: "Gwan, gwan" ("Vamos, vamos" [*WP* 230; *PS* 294]); "kinfolks" ("parientes" [*WP* 230; *PS* 295]); "Yessum" ("Sí, señora" [*WP* 231; *PS* 295]); "he aint never been bathed before" ("*nunca se ha bañado antes*" [*WP* 231; *PS* 295]); and "'You ought to tore up a sheet and slid down it,' the plump convict said" ("Debías haber roto una sábana y bajarte por ella —dijo el penado gordo" [*WP* 231; *PS* 296]), the latter line being set off by Borges as a paragraph.

achieves in this respect comes close to epitomizing what Steiner, in *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, points to as the translator's greatest triumph:

> Fidelity is not literalism or any technical device for rendering 'spirit'. The whole formulation, as we have found it over and over in discussions of translation, is hopelessly vague. The translator, the exegetist, the reader is *faithful* to his text, makes his response responsible, only when he endeavors to restore the balance of forces, of integral presence, which his appropriative comprehension has disrupted. (302)

This, we feel, is what Borges achieves with his translation of *The Wild Palms*. And since Faulkner's characters are so profoundly a function of language, of words speaking to other words within a specific social, temporal, and aesthetic context, this balancing of forces and of integral presence that Steiner speaks of as being so crucial to a successful translation enables Borges to be, certain tonal issues notwithstanding, quite successful with his own, reconstructed characterizations in *Las palmeras salvajes*.

Faulkner, Borges, and the Role of the New Reader

As we shall now see, however, it is really the reader who emerges as the most important character for both Faulkner and Borges, a point which allows one to argue that, in a systematic sense, "Reader Response" criticism in the Americas actually begins, with Brazil's Machado de Assis as the great precursor, with the appearance of "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" and, concomitantly, with the Borges translation of Faulkner's *The Wild Palms* in 1939-40 (Lowe and Fitz 14, 93-97). Although it can be argued that, in the United States, Canada, and England, the Reader Response approach begins with "I. A. Richards's discussions of emotional response in the 1920s or with the work of D. W. Harding and Louise Rosenblatt in the 1930s," with Walker Gibson's 1950 essay on the "mock reader," or, as is more commonly thought, with Gerald Prince's 1973 essay on the "narratee" and the work of Stanley Fish in the 1970s (Tompkins x, x-xii, xvi-xvii), those who take a more comparative and inter-American approach to this issue will immediately recognize Faulkner, Borges, and the Machado de Assis of the 1880-1908 period as the New World writers who first championed the reader and called for her liberation from passivity and authorial control.[32]

Upon its publication in 1939, critics immediately noticed that, as we have seen, *The Wild Palms* is an innovative exercise in literary counterpoint, one which departs from Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County setting and instead sets the experience of the human creature of the natural world, the "primitive" being (the convict and the pregnant woman, both nameless), against the experience of the human creature of the "civilized," or social world (Charlotte, Wilbourne, and the others whose lives are touched by them [Brooks 205-06]). Types, rather than individual characters alone, are thus brought into play, with the result that *The Wild Palms* possesses a hybrid power, one that is both realistic and mythic in nature. More than this, however, the novel is also, according to Edmund Volpe, "a bold innovation in the technique of the novel, a variation and extension of the multiple-points-of-view technique" that Faulkner had employed so effectively in earlier works like *As I Lay Dying* and *Absalom, Absalom!* and "by which the novelist tells his story through the consciousness of several characters without obvious authorial interference" (213). Because in these texts the reader must actually become, in Volpe's words, "another investigator, another consciousness," someone who carefully considers each and every utterance for its relationship to the others and who, in the process, threads the narrative pieces together, as one makes a quilt, Faulkner here "pushes the technique of reader participation one step further" (213). We believe that Borges, who was pondering this very same concept as he was teaching Faulkner, writing his *Discusión* pieces about what his own "new narrative" might be like, and composing his *ficciones*, must have seen in *The Wild Palms* how "the reader is forced, by this technique, to become an active participant in the process of literary creation" (Volpe 213). Working the same ground, Borges knew, as Faulkner did, that in this new kind of writing, it is the reader who "must establish the thematic relationship of the stories, recognize the parallels and discover the truth" (213). Borges's reaction to this Faulkner novel, we feel, would have confirmed for him that a narrative could, indeed, be written so that the reader, detective-like, was forced to engage creatively in the extrapolation of its meaning and in the construction of its relevance and to recognize, finally, how the ultimate truth of a text lies in the relationship of its constituent parts to one another, to the whole structure, and to the reader's ability to interpret these.[33]

What is truly startling, however, about what Faulkner achieves with *The Wild Palms* is, as Volpe notes, that he adds "another dimension to the modern novel by permitting his reader to indict himself for sympathizing with the kind of romantic love the author is satirizing" (213). In other words, Faulkner sets up a narrative structure in which even the alert reader will be deceived, led in one direction only to find out later, as she reads more, that she has been lured into a series of cul de sacs, all plausible but none cancelling out any of the others; Borges, in advance of Faulkner, was already experimenting with such narrative snares in the form of the labyrinth and the story that purports to be an essay and with which, by means of mirrors, metafictional uncertainties, ironically self-referential structures, philosophical conundrums, the blurring of the traditional distinctions between fiction

[32] See Iser 136-52; Kinney 110. Iser cites Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, arguing that (as Brazil's Machado de Assis had begun to do in 1880 with *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*, trans. Gregory Rabassa) the American author's use of the ellipsis lures the reader into a more active role in the interpretation of the text while Kinney, making a similar point, notes the ways *The Wild Palms* employs "parallel and counterpoint" to engage the reader in a more direct fashion (110).

[33] John Matthews notes that John Irwin's work on doubling in Faulkner, and on Faulkner's interest in the genre of detective fiction and the importance that readerly involvement has to it, leads one to conclude that Borges might have been "particularly drawn" to *The Wild Palms* because of "the precision and extent" of its narrative doubling (message to the authors, 9 Aug. 2008).

and nonfiction, and *doppelgängers*, he was both leavening his own "nueva narrativa" and, like Faulkner (though, we believe, in a more deliberate fashion), actually changing the nature of narrative as a genre.

Still and all, we also believe that Borges saw in Faulkner, and particularly in *The Wild Palms*, the literary realization of much of what he had been searching for, and from the hand of a writer he greatly admired and whom he described, in his *El Hogar* review of *The Wild Palms*, as "el primer novelista de nuestro tiempo" ("the first [ranking] novelist of our time" [62]). It may well be that in contemplating the ironic intertextuality that lies at the heart of *The Wild Palms*, and in considering the demands it places on the reader, Borges decided that this was the Faulkner novel he would translate. Borges scholars have long wondered why, since he clearly recognized that other Faulkner novels, such as *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, and, especially, *Absalom, Absalom!* were superior works of art, he chose to translate *The Wild Palms*, a work he, like the majority of Faulkner critics, ranked beneath the others. Irving Howe, for example, writes that "[m]ost of Faulkner's influential critics have agreed that *The Wild Palms* is a failure" (233) though, he adds later, "Faulkner's device of alternating sections of the two stories may be judged a *tour de force* that," at least, "partly succeeds" (242), the latter judgement being of singular importance for Borges, for it reveals a kind of formal experimentalism that greatly interested him and with which he himself was then working (Vickery 156-57). And Borges himself declares, in his review of *The Wild Palms*, that it is "la menos apta de sus obras" ("the least suitable [or apt] of his [Faulkner's] works"), adding that in his earlier, better novels, the "novedades técnicas parecen necesarias, inevitables" ("the new techniques seem necessary, [and] inevitable") while "En '*The Wild Palms*' son menos atractivas que incómodas, menos justificables que exasperantes" ("In *The Wild Palms* they are less attractive than inconvenient, less justifiable than exasperating" [qtd. in Monegal 373]). In many ways, as Volpe argues, *The Wild Palms* represents something of a turning point for Faulkner, but for Borges, the novel's structural complexity, its textual self-referentiality, and, above all, its insistence on a new and more creative reader, someone who can hold several, often conflicting interpretive possibilities at the same time and who can tie and untie them as different perspectives, realizations, and reading strategies dictate, *Las palmeras salvajes* represents an opportunity to create the kind of "new narrative" he had been formulating in his mind (212-13, 230; Brooks 219-29).[34] In short, for Faulkner and for Borges it is the reader's evolving response to the text, to its reality as a self-enclosed semiotic system, that brings it most fully to life and allows it to live on, speaking to people far beyond its original time and place and in ways that the author could never have imagined.

Another theory that needs to be considered, we feel, is that Borges, in recognizing the shortcomings of *The Wild Palms*, chose to translate it precisely because he felt this was the one Faulkner text that he felt he could make better in

[34]See also Waggoner 145. In discussing *The Wild Palms*, Waggoner observes that, in this novel, "the reader must do part of the work which the novelist normally does for him" (145).

translation. Before one rejects this possibility as translation heresy, one should remember that this attitude about translation—that the translator has the right to improve a text (indeed, he has an obligation to do so if he feels the original text has the potential to become a superior work of literary art)—guided Borges's creative approach to translation work. Like Novalis (who, very strategically and, one presumes, for the reader's benefit, is actually mentioned in "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"), Borges believed the translator "could reshape and improve an original" and that, important for our argument here, "[a] translation can be more faithful to the work of literature than the original when the original fails to fulfill its own potentialities and latencies," which may well have been how Borges viewed *The Wild Palms* (Kristal, *Invisible Work* 31, 32-33). Since Borges (anticipating Barthes) knew from his own readerly and writerly experience that *The Wild Palms* was far from "the best introduction to Faulkner" that one could get (this being a crucial issue for him since he wanted to make Faulkner's genius available to a generation of young Spanish American writers whose command of English was not yet sufficient to allow them to read Faulkner in the original English), it has always seemed "paradoxical" to Borges scholars that "this is the Faulkner book he elected to translate," with his version of it being "considered as good as or *even better than* the original" (Monegal 373). As we have suggested, Borges's belief that the translator has the right, even the duty, to make a good (and deserving) text better could easily have played into his decision to transform this flawed 1939 novel and not one of Faulkner's earlier texts, which Borges knew quite well were vastly superior works of art. In short, Borges may have chosen to translate *The Wild Palms* because it emphasized the important new role the reader would have to play in its interpretation and because he felt it was a "diamond in the rough," a text by a writer he regarded as the "first novelist"of his time, and a text he felt he could improve.

But if the reader is, as we have postulated, the most important character, what does this mean as she reacts to each of the two stories, "The Wild Palms" and "Old Man," and, finally, to the two stories combined or taken together, that is, as the two sides of the novelistic coin known as *The Wild Palms*? What would Borges have seen as he read the two stories and considered their relationship, and how, as the creative reader and writer that he was, did he respond in his translation of the Faulkner work?

First of all (and as we have already indicated), we believe that Borges would have immediately recognized that, like Plato, Cervantes, and Flaubert before him, Faulkner is commenting on the degree to which people allow themselves to be deceived by what they read, most especially by stories that romanticize love. In this, as many critics have suggested, Faulkner may well have been taking exception to the ways he felt his countryman and contemporary, Ernest Hemingway, dealt with this issue. In "The Wild Palms" it is certainly an exaggerated (and fatally) idealized notion of love that drives the narrative, one that the reader both feels sympathetic to (at least at the beginning, when Charlotte is dying) and repulsed by (when we have learned all the details of her

self-centered and puerile story), the two responses being held simultaneously, though not necessarily in balance or in any kind of interpretational fixity. One feels much more empathy for the helpless and all but illiterate convict and the pregnant woman he is determined to save than for the educated Wilbourne and Charlotte, whose plight is self-induced, though both couples are victims of silly notions about love and life gleaned from books. Just as the convict was led astray by believing what he read in his cops and robbers stories, so, too, are Charlotte and Wilbourne undone by taking to heart—and then patterning their lives on—absurdly romantic ideas about love. As the reader learns in the third section of "The Wild Palms," for example: "There was a gray light on the lake and when he [Wilbourne] heard the loon he knew exactly what it was, he even knew what it would look like, listening to the raucous idiot voice, thinking how man alone of all creatures . . . believes only what it reads" (*WP* 90). Hewing again very closely to the original, though with some variance of Faulkner's rather idiosyncratic punctuation, Borges once again creates a Spanish text with a series of images and an ebb and flow remarkably similar to the original: "Había sobre el lago una luz gris y cuando oyó al haragán, se dió cuenta exactamente de lo que era, hasta de lo que parecía, escuchando la voz ronca, pensando cómo sólo el hombre . . . sólo cree en lo que lee" (*PS* 119-20). The two most arresting alterations in the Borges translation here involve the use of the word "haragán" for "loon" and "escuchando la voz ronca" for "listening to the raucous idiot voice." Although in certain parts of the Caribbean region it can mean "mop," "haragán" more commonly refers not to an animal, as the English word "loon" does, but to a person who is considered an idler, a shirker, or, more colloquially, a good-for-nothing. When used as an adjective, it normally connotes idleness, laziness, or sluggishness, and when used as a verb, "haraganear," it typically means to "hang out" or otherwise waste time. Unless, in Borges's time, "haragán" was used with reference to a certain type of aquatic bird, as is the case in Faulkner's scene, its selection here as the translation of "loon" seems questionable. As in the case of "sorghum," one wonders if the modern Spanish word for "loon," "somorgujo," did not exist when Borges was working on the translation or, in fact, if what we have here is another slip by Borges, a misreading of the English term and the context in which it occurs. Did Borges equivocate over "loon" and "looney," for example, and thus find himself forced to reconsider who or what Faulkner is referring to with this reference? This line of interpretation gains a bit of plausibility when we examine how Borges handled the phrase "listening to the raucous idiot voice," which he reduces to "escuchando la voz ronca," literally "listening to the hoarse/husky/guttural/raucous voice," the identity of which could be either animal or human. While, etymologically speaking, "ronca" might do for "raucous," the loss of "idiotic" here in the Spanish version hurts, since Faulkner's native English reader would, because of the syntactical arrangement of the sentence, probably have attributed the "raucous idiot voice" first to the loon, which inhabits lakes and which has a very distinctive call, and second, to the coarse and, all too often, idiotic behavior/voice of the human creature, which, as we have seen, simmers as the dominant thematic motif in "The Wild Palms." By going with "haragán" rather than a more generic word like "duck" ("pato"), as he did earlier by substituting "serpent" for "moccasin", it seems more like Borges is here inclined toward the human condition rather than the animal, though it is certainly true that, like Faulkner's, Borges's version allows the reader to shift interpretational gears and so allows the entire reference to apply to the worlds of both the loon and the human creatures. Though a little less balanced, the ambiguity of Faulkner's text comes through in Borges's transformation of it. The great achievement of Borges's rewriting of this scene, however, is that he ends it with the same verb Faulkner does, "reads," and in the same verb tense, which amplifies, as in the original, the importance of the life-as-romance motif that Faulkner is satirizing.

Another key literary allusion to the pernicious effects that stem from our gorging on literary presentations of overly sentimentalized romantic love comes in the form of the two references in *The Wild Palms* to the American writer, Sara Teasdale, who died in 1933 and whose 1937 anthology of confessional poetry about women, death, and nature, *Collected Poems*, Faulkner would certainly have known about and found germane to the attitude he is critiquing here. Curiously, however, Borges omits Teasdale's name both times he translates the passages in which Faulkner makes reference to her, choosing, instead, to put a somewhat different, and less pointed, spin on them. The two Teasdale allusions come in rapid succession, and both are identical, which leads one to suspect that they were intended to function as some kind of marker for the reader. In the first instance, McCord, in response to some romantic nonsense that Wilbourne has just said, declares, "For sweet Jesus Schopenhauer. . . . What the bloody hell kind of ninth-rate Teasdale is this?" which Borges translates as "—En nombre de Jesuscristo Schopenhauer . . . qué ramplonería de novena clase es ésta?" (*WP* 85-86; *PS* 114). Two pages later, the reader is once again privy to Wilbourne's love-besotted stream of consciousness—"*If we are to lie so, it will be together in the wavering solitude in spite of Mac and his ninth-rate Teasdale who seems to remember a hell of a lot of what people read*"—which Borges recreates in this fashion: "*Si tenemos que estar así, será juntos en la indecisa soledad a pesar de Mac y de su cursilería de novena clase que se acuerda una barbaridad de lo que lee la gente*" (*WP* 88; *PS* 117). Although Borges elects to drop the references to Teasdale, with his rendering of "ninth-rate" as "de novena clase," he successfully emphasizes, in both cases, the treacly quality of the literature itself, which, one feels, is the most important aspect of this reference. On the other hand, one wonders why Borges did not include Teasdale's name in his translation since, later on, he does include, and without benefit of an explanatory note, the name of Owen Wister, surely an even more obscure reference to American literature than Teasdale. The mystery here is deepened because the Wister allusion also pertains to the influence that books can have on our lives: "He [Wilbourne] was trying to remember something out of a book, years ago, of Owen Wister's," the book in question being the archetypal genre of the American Western, *The Virginian*, published in 1902

(*WP* 241). Once again, Borges follows Faulkner closely, rewriting this line as "[t]rataba de recordar algo de un libro, hacía años, de Owen Wister," with the imperfect Spanish verb, "trataba," nicely capturing the original's open-ended sense of past time (*PS* 307).

Perhaps the most direct linking of what we read in books to how we live our life, however, comes from the mouth of Charlotte, who, in the second section of "The Wild Palms," declares, to Wilbourne,

> I dont think I can change me because the second time I ever saw you I learned what I had read in books but I never had actually believed: that love and suffering are the same thing and that the value of love is the sum of what you have to pay for it and anytime you get it cheap you have cheated yourself. (*WP* 41)

Borges translates this statement, closely and accurately, as

> creo que no puedo cambiarme porque la segunda vez que te vi supe que era verdad lo que había leído en libros y lo que nunca creí; que el amor y dolor son una sola cosa y que el valor del amor es la suma de lo que se paga por él y cada vez que se consigue barato uno se está engañando. (*PS* 57)

Later, in the third section of "The Wild Palms," the same point is driven home when Wilbourne, in an exchange with Charlotte, finally realizes that she is enamored not of him but of the concept of love itself, a concept which, for her, is the altar on which she prays and the god to which she is now devoting her entire existence:

> "So it's not me you believe in, put trust in, it's love." She looked at him. "Not just me; any man."
>
> "Yes. It's love. They say love dies between two people. That's wrong. It doesn't die. It just leaves you, goes away, if you are not good enough, worthy enough." (*WP* 71)

Reading and translating with great care and insight, Borges does not miss or give short shrift to a single aspect of this important declaration:

> —Entonces ne crees en mí; en quien confías, es en el amor. — Ella lo miró. — No soy yo; cualquier hombre.
>
> —Sí, es el amor. Dicen que el amor muere entre dos personas. Eso no es cierto. No muere. Lo deja a uno, se va si uno no es digno, si no lo merece bastante. (*PS* 95-96)

Syntactically, thematically, and tonally, Borges succeeds brilliantly in transforming this short, but revealing, dialogue between Wilbourne and Charlotte. Beyond its excellence as a translation, this passage also demonstrates how carefully Borges is reading and reacting to the Faulkner text, for it is clear that he is reproducing, step by step, what is in the original a slow but progressive revelation of Charlotte's character, which is dominated by her ardent embrace of this profoundly romantic idea about love. As Volpe notes, there is some question as to whether, even in the original, Faulkner's American reader of 1937 would have been cognizant of this subtle, attenuated revelation about Charlotte, or whether the demands placed on the reader were "excessive," though, as we can

see in his translation of it, Borges most certainly was not only cognizant but appreciative of these demands (38-39, 213). In fact, there is every reason to think that he would have been heartened to see how this new role for the reader might work—and how it might be improved, refined, or intensified. Given his interest, during the late 1930s, in finding ways to augment the reader's involvement in a text, it seems entirely possible that Borges was not only picking up on what Faulkner was demanding of his reader, he was thinking about how he would build the same new kind of readerly dynamic into his translation, and, through that dynamic he would create a new kind of Spanish-language narrative, as Monegal has suggested (373).

This Faulknerian concern with the effects books have on us, an issue which, for Borges, pointed to the interaction between language and reality, would, we believe, have instantly struck a chord with the Argentinean writer who, as a man of books (and therefore an experienced and accomplished reader), was acutely conscious of the difference between literature and life and the ways we humans rely on language to create, sustain, and alter our identities. So while Borges, reading carefully and analyzing his reactions to the text, would have almost certainly found the story of Charlotte and Wilbourne annoying because of being so nonsensical and illogical, he would have understood it, fully aware not only of what Faulkner was doing or trying to do, but why. Borges would have especially reacted to Faulkner's opening story (the one that, literarily speaking, is most problematic) as a problem of literary criticism and aesthetics, that is, as a study of how it devolves in the larger structure of the novel and in terms of its thematic relationship with its counterpoint, "Old Man," which, by throwing "The Wild Palms" into sharp relief, shows us the value of a close, engaged reading, one in which all the elements that make up a narrative are carefully considered. As in any semiotic system, where one sign, one word, gains and loses meaning in relation to the other signs and words in the same structure, each story in *The Wild Palms* gains and loses meaning in direct relation to the other story. Read separately, each seems shallow and weak, especially "The Wild Palms"; read together, however, as commentaries on each other and as components of a larger pattern of meaning, each gains in power and depth. This idea, which may well explain why the French structuralists of the 1950s and early 1960s were so smitten by Borges's work (which seemed to show what their abstract ideas about language, structure, and meaning would look like as literature), is basically the underlying argument behind Borges's theory of his "literatura fantástica," his decision, in the 1930s, to substitute what he believed to be the tighter, less arbitrary structures (and strictures) of magic for the imprecision of realism and mimesis as the conceptual model behind the writing of his new narrative. And, of course, a new reader, someone not put off by the dissolution of the supposed bond between language and three-dimensional reality and someone who could see how the play of meaning was engendered by the reader's response to the elements of the structure itself, was needed for this new narrative. For this new reader, then, the words comprising the text being read were going to be in constant dialogue with the words being used in the

process of interpretation. Words, as Borges had come to realize about the kind of fiction he wanted to write, will henceforth be speaking not to an immutable and attainable final truth (the desire for which we think of as logocentrism), but to other words, and doing so, moreover, in an endless process of creative contemplation, one subject, at every turn, to the vagaries of such additionally destabalizing factors as age, gender, race, social standing, life experience, and political ideology.

Conclusion

In this essay, we have argued that the kinds of decisions Borges makes in his translation of *The Wild Palms* not only make for an excellent and fascinating translation, but that they also illustrate the consolidation of Borges's emerging theory concerning the importance of the role the reader plays in the game of literature. For Borges, "no problem is as consubstantial to literature and its modest mystery as the one posed by translation," and no activity is more important to translation than reading ("The Homeric Versions" 69).[35] The strength of this argument lies chiefly in our belief that the Borges translation of *The Wild Palms* must be read in terms of the creative decisions Borges was making at this decisive moment in his own work. The weakness of our argument is that we cannot prove this to be the case; there exists no definitive statement by Borges that his translation of this particular Faulkner novel was the catalyst that allowed him to concretize his new ideas about the nature of narrative and about the role the reader plays in its consumption. Nevertheless, we feel that the types of decisions Borges makes in the transformation of *The Wild Palms* into *Las palmeras salvajes*, coming when they did, must be judged to have been central to Borges's vision of the kind of "new narrative" he wanted to write, one in which a text's *inherent fictionality* would be emphasized and one in which the role of the alert, engaged reader would be of the utmost importance. This underscores Rabassa's contention that translation is "the closest possible reading a book can have" ("Gregory Rabassa" 203), and that, at least in the interpretive stage, "the translator is really more of a reader than a writer" (Lewis B14), though, as Borges believed (and as Rabassa's work shows), it is the combination of skillful reading and skillful writing that finally allows a translation to become "a convincing work of literature" (Kristal, *Invisible Work* 87). Borges had, already in 1937, praised Faulkner for recognizing and cultivating "the verbal artifices of narrative," a critical comment that can easily be taken as constituting a crucial development of Borges's rethinking of the ontological and epistemological dimensions of narrative and how his "new reader" would have to approach his "new narrative" (Monegal 372). Following Rabassa, we, too, believe that the best translator is also the best reader, the one who is able to see all of a text's flaws and possibilities and who, like both Borges and Pierre Menard, is able to enrich a text by reinventing it in ways never before imagined, not even by the author, whose language and vision remain locked in a

[35]See Rabassa, *Treason* 41-42; "Treason" 31-32; Kristal, *Invisible Work* xiv; and Alazraki 235-36.

specific time and place. Provable or not, to us it seems inconceivable that Borges, with his capacious mind and integrative, synthesizing outlook, would have translated *The Wild Palms* and written "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" during the same stretch of time without having seen them as being cut from the same bolt of cloth. To us, it seems much more likely that, for the Borges of 1939-40, the fecund period in which all this happened, the two operations (the translation of *The Wild Palms* and the writing of "Pierre Menard") were essentially mirror images of each other, with the one, the translation, serving as the textual proof of the other. In reading and rewriting *The Wild Palms*, Borges, passing through Faulkner, became his own Pierre Menard.

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