

TRANSLATION AND THE RECEPTION AND INFLUENCE OF
LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE IN THE UNITED STATES

By

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To Aimee, Daniel, Rebekah, and Baby Krause

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INTRODUCTION

Translation mediates the exchange of literature in the Americas, the success of which depends upon reliable translations.¹ But what happens when a translation distorts the most salient aspects of the original text? In most cases, readers of English translations of Latin American literature² lack the linguistic training to ascertain their reliability, which means they depend totally on the fidelity of the translation. Certainly one can argue that a poor translation is better than none at all, but how do poor English translations affect the reception of these canonical texts of modern Latin American literature? This is the critical question I seek to answer. In this dissertation, I argue that the concept of the “failed” translation has been largely misunderstood as it applies to certain canonical works of Spanish American and Brazilian literature. I specifically analyze several English translations of two *ficciones* of Jorge Luis Borges, different English versions of “Las alturas de Macchu Picchu,” by Pablo Neruda, and the Scott-Buccleuch version of *Dom Casmurro*, by Machado de Assis. Although occasional stylistic missteps are inevitable, a translation truly fails, I will argue, only when it consistently misinterprets and, consequently, misrepresents the source

¹ Edith Grossman, in her recent study *Why Translation Matters*, makes the following declaration that also applies to the burgeoning field of inter-American letters: “And the very concept of world literature as a discipline fit for academic study depends on the availability of translations” (13).

² In using the term Latin American literature, I refer to both the Brazilian and Spanish American traditions.

text. Moreover, a “failed” translation hinders the reception of Latin American literature in the United States because it offers a distorted, and therefore unreliable, version of the original text to the American reader. Nevertheless, translation “failure” occurs along a sliding scale; there are different levels and kinds of failure. Based on the critical spectrum I will establish, I analyze the influence of translation in the American receptions of Borges, Neruda, and Machado de Assis, three of the most exported and influential writers of twentieth-century Latin American literature. In light of the advent of the field of inter-American literary studies in the United States, the reception of these, and other, authors still depends upon the quality of their work in translation.³

This dissertation utilizes the comparative method in approaching various English translations of Borges, Neruda, and Machado de Assis, focusing on the similarities, but more importantly, on the differences and the subsequent effect these had on their reception by American readers.⁴ By the late 1960s, translations of Latin American literature had established Spanish American and, to a lesser degree, Brazilian literature

³ The concept of inter-American literature comprises the literatures of Anglophone and Francophone Canada, the United States, Spanish America, Brazil, and the Caribbean. In this dissertation, I focus solely on the reception of Spanish American and Brazilian authors in the United States. Certainly, one could apply the theoretical and methodological approaches of this study to a number of literary traditions. See also Fitz, “In Quest of ‘Nuestras Américas.’”

⁴ Lowe and Fitz explain the advantage to highlighting differences in literary studies: “Indeed, for the study of inter-American literature, as for comparative literature generally, the most vital aspects of the proposition reside with the differences, not the similarities, for it is in differences that we can see what is unique about each American culture and text we are considering” (*Translation* 22).

in the United States. I will argue that there is a direct correlation between the quality of these translations and the degree to which each author selected for study was positively received. In 1969, Emir Rodríguez Monegal—an early and strong proponent of comparative Latin American and inter-American literature—ruminated on the need for excellent translations but also for critics who were trained to comment on the quality thereof:

First, it is evident that knowledge of the new Latin American literature in the United States should be stimulated. For this purpose, besides the extremely important task being realized for decades in universities and specialized centers, more and better English translations are needed. But it is not enough to have just more translations. It is necessary to create at the same time, or stimulate in any case, the kind of criticism capable of orienting the American reader toward these translations. (“The New American Literature” 12–13)

In spite of Rodríguez Monegal’s progressive admonition, few scholars of Latin American literature studied translation at great length and certainly not in terms of reception and influence.

One of the first, and finest, examples of using translation as a critical approach to literary analysis was John Felstiner’s *Translating Neruda*, an in-depth study of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* and his process in translating it into English. Citing his study as a pioneering example of the intersection of translation and literary studies, Margaret Sayers Peden predicated in 1980: “I believe we will see a future era of literary criticism in which translation is increasingly employed as a viable and

valuable critical tool” (“Arduous” 65). She describes the interrelations between critic and translator in their roles as reader:

The most precise reading, theoretically, should be obtained from specialized readers such as literary critics, or other translators. Basically, a translation is an extremely close reading of a text. (“Translating the Boom” 161)

Gregory Rabassa, renowned translator and professor of Latin American and comparative literature, also believed “the ideal translation ought to be the closest possible reading of a work” (“If This Be Treason” 23).⁵ In Rabassa’s estimation, the translator exists in a liminal space: “The translator may be the one person who exists simultaneously in two different worlds: as he works he must be both critic and writer, writer and reader” (“The Translator’s Voice” 17). As a practicing translator and literary critic, Sayers Peden shares Rabassa’s vantage point of the multifaceted role of the translator:

The critic and the translator approach the text with the same purpose. If they are to fulfill their obligation efficiently and intelligently, each must enter, must deeply penetrate, the text. The goals of the translator and critic are identical: to discover and to interpret the essence of the text, to determine what makes it distinct from other texts (and, Borges would add, the *same* as other texts), and to communicate this knowledge. (“Arduous” 65–66)

Nevertheless, there are differences between the two: “But it is in the mode of communication that the roles of translator and critic diverge.

⁵ Rabassa frequently promulgated this view: “The most careful reading one can give a text is to translate it” (“Slouching Back Toward Babel” 32); “I think that this bears out my contention that a translation is nothing but a close reading, perhaps the closest reading possible” (“The Translator’s Voice” 10).

The critic communicates the text by explication; the translator, by recreation” (66). Ultimately, Rodríguez Monegal, Sayers Peden, and Rabassa all realize that at the heart of translation resides an interactive process of careful reading, critical analysis, and skillful creative writing. Employing translation as a critical approach to literary studies is not only possible, but also highly advantageous since translation, both as a process and as an object of study, lays bare the inner workings of textual form and content. This dissertation, adhering to these aforementioned notions of reading, compares and contrasts certain selected translations of texts by certain canonical writers, and in so doing, analyzes multiple readings and rewritings of the same source text, situating them in a larger context of reception and influence in an inter-American perspective.

In the first chapter, “Rewriting Borges in English,” I analyze *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933–1969*, translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni, who worked in collaboration with the author. While some criticize di Giovanni and Borges for reshaping, reworking, and, ultimately, rewriting many of the original *ficciones*, others argue that their partnership yielded a series of highly reliable and, therefore, successful translations. Di Giovanni and Borges indeed rewrote and restructured certain pieces, which I show in my analysis of “Pedro Salvadores” and “Las ruinas circulares,” but they did so in order to meet the particular needs and requirements of an American readership. These

translations had no perceived negative effect on Borges's reception in the United States. In fact, many consider *The Aleph and Other Stories* as definitive and authoritative versions in English, which I will argue is due to Borges's participation as co-translator, even though the text is now out of print. In my discussion of translation "failure" and its role in reception and influence, I will show that *The Aleph and Other Stories* represents one end of the spectrum, that is, how a successful translation enhances and facilitates a positive reception.

In the second chapter, "Misrepresenting Neruda in *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*," I move along the continuum to a more problematic point and analyze Nathaniel Tarn's translation of Neruda's famous and ambitious poem. The chapter opens with a brief discussion of the unique challenges inherent in verse translation. Then follows an overview of the issues and controversies surrounding the role of translation in the reception of Pablo Neruda in the United States from the 1920s to the 1970s. The heart of the chapter consists of a comparative translation analysis of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*, triangulating the versions of Tarn, John Felstiner, and Jack Schmitt. In spite of numerous infelicities that ultimately overwhelm Neruda's poetic voice in English, the poem does not, in the hands of these three translators, ever completely "fail" in its ability to convey the spirit of the original. Consequently, what the American reader of Neruda receives is a beautiful and majestic English language poem but one that reflects the translator's poetic sensibilities,

which, in the influential case of Tarn, tends to simplify much of the ambiguous syntax.

Finally, as an example of outright translation “failure,” I analyze Robert Scott-Buccleuch’s translation of *Dom Casmurro*. The translator here excises nine chapters, realigns others, and subsequently blunts the English-speaking reader’s ability to access the crucial metanarrative structure, which is fundamental in understanding the overall brilliance of the novel. The excision of these chapters weakens the relationships between author, narrator, and reader that one finds throughout the novel, which converts an exceptionally original narrative into a very conventional one. Consequently, what the American reader receives is a seriously flawed text that grossly misrepresents the literary genius of the author. This “failed” translation has hindered the reception of Machado de Assis in the United States and, as a consequence, has damaged his reputation in the field of inter-American studies, because the unsuspecting reader takes the Scott-Buccleuch version of this Brazilian masterpiece as a reliable translation of *Dom Casmurro*. Nevertheless, this particular translation of *Dom Casmurro* effectively leaches out much of the brilliance of the original, turning one of the great Brazilian novels into something ordinary and mediocre, and this is why it fails as a translation.

In the conclusion I will draw parallels and highlight the disparities in how these three authors and their translations, as well as other

canonical figures, were received and how they influenced, or failed to influence, readers in the United States during the 1960s. The situation of *Dom Casmurro* as a “failed” translation is unfortunately not unique when discussing the reception of Brazilian literature in the United States. It is my contention that the poor English translations have hampered the reception of Brazilian literature in the United States; *Dom Casmurro* is simply emblematic of a larger pattern. Certainly, there are other factors involved, as well as examples that serve as an exception to this trend, such as Jorge Amado. Regardless, poor translations lead to poor reception and, in the case of Brazil, these “failed” translations have involved some of Brazil’s greatest writers and have, as a consequence, seriously compromised the reputation of Brazilian letters in the United States and in the developing field of inter-American literature. Although each text deserves further study, I will briefly analyze other “failed” translations of Brazilian literature: *O cortiço*, by Aluísio Azevedo (*A Brazilian Tenement*), *Macunaíma* by Mario de Andrade, and *Grande sertão: veredas*, by João Guimarães Rosa (*Devil to Pay in the Backlands*). Each of these texts “fails” for different reasons, but, fundamentally, they all exemplify a high level of misinterpretation, one that has impeded, I believe, the reception of Brazilian literature in the United States.

Although numerous scholars have studied the reception of Latin American literature in the United States, especially since the Boom, only a handful have dedicated their attention to the role of translation in this

process. Trailblazers, such as Irene Rostagno, Piers Armstrong, and Johnny Payne in their respective book-length studies, offer a panoramic view of Latin American literature received by the US literary establishment. Each author takes a different approach to the artistic and intellectual exchange that occurred in the twentieth century. Rostagno, in *Searching for Recognition* focuses “on those Americans—writers, critics, publishers, and editors—who in a fifty-year period struggled to make Latin American letters known to the US public” (xi). Armstrong’s *Third World Literary Fortunes*, which, in many ways, complements Rostagno’s study, specifically looks at the reception afforded Brazilian literature during the same period. He examines the socio-historical, cultural, political, ideological, and aesthetic reasons behind the comparatively lackluster reception of Brazilian authors in the United States, especially in contrast to their Spanish American contemporaries. Payne, in *Conquest of the New Word*, focuses on the “historical relationship between literature and dictatorship in modern Argentina and Uruguay” and the reception and influence of the respective literary production of those countries in the United States. While all three authors recognize and analyze the role of translation to varying degrees, there is little close textual analysis of the actual translations.

In many ways, this dissertation responds to and builds upon the recent work done by Elizabeth Lowe and Earl E. Fitz in *Translation and*

the Rise of Inter-American Literature.⁶ They focus on the egregiously underacknowledged role of the translator as, what one reviewer of their book calls, “the most important mediator between cultures and also the most intense reader of literary texts” (Schulte 83). Lowe and Fitz realize that the choices of the translator, at the interpretive, creative, and cultural level, ultimately determine how different readers with diverse sets of expectations receive a given work. They state:

It is our intention, then, to call attention to the importance translation has had, and continues to have, on the reception of Latin American literature in the United States, where it has made available to English speakers the richness, sophistication, and diversity of writing in Brazil and Spanish America. (xvi)

I add to their readings of Borges, Neruda, and Machado by providing in-depth comparative textual analyses of several English translations within the context of their reception in the United States. I also follow their approach to both practical and conceptual issues of translation:

We have here chosen to focus both on the innumerable choices that the translator must make at the textual level, where the complex nature of the word-to-word exchange wrought by the translator between two different texts takes place, and on the more conceptual—though egregiously underappreciated—problem of how very different cultures,

⁶ In their concluding remarks, in fact, they describe the basic framework of this very dissertation: “For doctoral students, translations [...] might facilitate a close comparative reading of a translation and its original text to ascertain what was gained and what was lost, linguistically, aesthetically, and culturally, in the process of translation itself. This latter form of translation scholarship, when amplified with notes and full analytical discussions of the myriad decisions that the translator makes when interpreting the original text, can often be very successfully developed as a doctoral dissertation, as can a close comparative study of the various translations that may exist of a single source work, such as Borges, Neruda, or Machado in their various English versions” (174–75).

literary histories, and critical expectations can be brought together for purposes of mutual illumination. (xvi)

Like Lowe and Fitz, I do not focus my attention on the biographical aspect of the translator, which certainly has its place in a larger discussion. Rather, I focus on linguistic, stylistic, and cultural issues that directly affect the reception and influence of specific translations in the United States within the larger framework of inter-American studies.

Although this dissertation enters into dialogue with contemporary translation theory, it is not a treatise on translation studies. When citing theoretical and philosophical texts on the nature, process, and art of translation I tend to privilege statements, as we have already seen, made by translators of Latin American literature. If a translator or critic of Latin American literature—for example, Edith Grossman, Susan Jill Levine, or Gregory Rabassa—has offered an explanation that echoes Benjamin, Pound, Steiner, or even contemporary critics of translation studies, like Lawrence Venuti, Susan Bassnett, or André Lefevere, I value the former over the latter due to their intimate knowledge of and hands-on experience in translating Latin American literature. At times, I also refer to Latin American authors who were translators themselves, such as Machado de Assis, Borges, Cortázar, or Paz, since theirs is an incomparable perspective on both the process of creative writing and its transference into another language. I also do not deal with the politics of translation. Consequently, statements about publishers, literary agents, and reviewers will be brief and used only when they apply to the

reception of specific translations. While these cultural agents play a significant role in determining what is published, when, and in what quantities, my dissertation is concerned with how a translation is received after publication.

Within this dissertation, I make certain assumptions about translation. First, translation matters. I do not view it as an impossible task. Even in the case of verse translation, I do not view poetry as untranslatable. Nevertheless, there are aspects of language (cultural allusions, expletives, slang, insults, wordplays, parody, puns, and high- and lowbrow humor)⁷ that are extremely difficult to translate because it is nearly impossible to find an exact equivalent in the other language.⁸ Second, I see translation as a form of dialogue or conversation between languages and cultures. As Lowe and Fitz point out, the study of translation is not only a cornerstone in comparative studies of the

⁷ Rabassa dedicates a good section of his article, “If This Be Treason,” to “untranslatable words” or the “impossibilities of translation.” *Regionalisms*: “Regional and local literature has a flavor that is immediately sensed in the original language. [...] The transfer of local or regional idiom into another language, therefore, must be listed as another of the impossibilities of translation” (24). *Expletives*: “If any form of word can be called untranslatable, meaning having a close adherence to the word-for-word meaning of the original, it is the expletive” (25). *Insults*: “The fact that insults cannot be rendered so closely as we might like means that while words can be translated directly, cultures themselves cannot be without grotesque distortion” (26). See also “Words Cannot Express...” or “You Can’t Say ‘Ain’t’ in Spanish” for the difficulty, or near-impossibility, of separating language from its cultural context.

⁸ Levine dedicates the majority of *The Subversive Scribe* to detailing the ways in which she and Cabrera Infante worked through tricky passages, rendering these difficult literary elements in the English translation of *Tres tristes tigres*. Rabassa suggests, “The best solution, of course, is the hardest, searching for some English equivalent or near-equivalent that sounds true. Otherwise the very sound of the foreign word will give the book a tone that it should not have” (“Ear” 84).

literature of the Americas,⁹ but also a way to combat cultural prejudice and misunderstanding:

Providing a new context for the study of American literary relations and American literary history, translation has made inter-American literary study possible as a field. But in doing so, it has also rejuvenated comparative literature as a discipline by reminding us all of its singular ability to cross borders, to overcome prejudices, and to promote better cultural understanding. (19–20)

As a facet of cross-cultural exchange, translation serves as an antidote or an inoculation against the disease of provincialism, parochialism, cultural ignorance, misunderstanding, and unresolved conflict.

Finally, I accept the fact that both good and bad translations exist, a point that helps us understand the overall problem of translation “failure.” Assigning a strict definition to the concept of the “failed” translation, however, proves difficult because the act of translation, as we have established, is multi-faceted and it is a form of creative writing, a point often made by Rabassa. Another problem resides in the paucity of criticism that specifically deals with translation. Theoreticians, critics, and translators all sporadically make reference to poor translations, but their observations tend to over-simplify complex aspects of the process or over-emphasize particular issues without placing them in a proper critical framework. A systematic rubric for assessing the success or

⁹ Daniel Balderston and Mary Schwartz, in their introduction to *Voice-overs*, state: “Translation has become both a mechanism and a metaphor for contemporary transnational cultures in the Americas. [...] Translation continues to be one of the main tools, and defining images, of Latin American culture in its relation to world cultures” (1).

failure of a translation does not currently exist, since a similar rubric for assessing literature in general is impractical, if not impossible.

Nevertheless, a point of departure for this discussion is the supposition that good translators and good translations do exist. But what exactly characterizes a good translator? Rabassa views the translator as a creative writer, a person who should possess all “the instincts and drives that go to make a writer,” as well as “a good knowledge of the language he is translating.” Grossman adds that translators, as writers or rewriters, “need to develop a keen sense of style in both languages [...] (7). Levine offers the following description:

The good translator performs a balancing act, then, attempting to push language beyond its limits while at the same time maintaining a common ground of dialogue between writer and reader, speaker and listener. (4)

Furthermore, the good translator must possess “an all-hearing and receptive ear through which he has stored up a great treasure of expressions, words, and turns of phrase” (Rabassa, “Silk Purse” 35).¹⁰ Conversely, as Rabassa describes it, we have the translator with a tin ear, who “is as deadly as a tone-deaf musician” (“Ear” 82). One of the desired outcomes, according to Grossman, is that the readers of the translation “will perceive the text, emotionally and artistically, in a manner that parallels and corresponds to the aesthetic experience of its

¹⁰ Grossman also regards “hearing” as an essential aspect of translation: “I always seem to conceive of and discuss the translating process as essentially auditory, something immediately available to other people, as opposed to a silent, solitary process. I think of the author’s voice and the sound of the text, then of my obligation to hear both as clearly and profoundly as possible, and finally of my equally pressing need to speak the piece in a second language” (12).

first readers.” She continues: “Good translations approach that purpose. Bad translations never leave the starting line” (7). She also points out that literal accuracy is rarely the trademark of a successful translation:

Fidelity is the noble purpose, the utopian ideal, of the literary translator, but let me repeat: faithfulness has little to do with what is called literal meaning. [...] A translator’s fidelity is not to lexical pairings but to context—the implications and echoes of the first author’s tone, intention, and level of discourse. Good translations are good because they are faithful to this contextual significance. They are not necessarily faithful to words or syntax, which are peculiar to specific languages and can rarely be brought over directly in any misguided and inevitably muddled effort to somehow replicate the original. (70–71)

Tone, which is linked to meaning, in Rabassa’s estimation, resists transference into another language, even in the hands of the most skillful translator: “Tone is the impossible part; it can only be approached, as languages sound so different (“You Can’t Say ‘Ain’t” 120). Rabassa then presents us with another conundrum. What is more important in translation, “accuracy or the flow of the prose?” He avers: “The question should really never have to be put, for we would hope that both would be present.” When a translator sacrifices rhythm for accuracy, the result is an “imitation or a trot,” a version that is “little more than a linear glossary” (82). “If it reads well but is grossly inaccurate,” Rabassa continues, “we are faced with a sub-creation which may well have its merits but which is not what it purports to be” (“Ear” 83).

Walter Benjamin begins his essay “The Task of the Translator” with a discussion on the detrimental effect that occurs when a translator

manipulates or adjusts a given text for the benefit of the reader. He argues, “the essential quality [of a literary work] is not statement or the imparting of information.” He continues:

Yet any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information—hence, something inessential. This is the hallmark of bad translations. (71)

A poor translation alters the “essential quality” in consideration of the sensibilities or capacities of the reader to receive or understand the text. What then is the “essential quality” of a text? In the following rhetorical question, Benjamin suggests it is the ineffable and unquantifiable element of art:

But do we not generally regard as the essential substance of a literary work what it contains in addition to information—as even a poor translator will admit—the unfathomable, the mysterious, the “poetic,” something that a translator can reproduce only if he is also a poet? (71–72)

The literary translator, therefore, is not a mere messenger or cipher of codes; he or she is a co-creator with the author. The translator must render the aesthetic aspects of the work as well as impart the information transmitted in the content.

In *After Babel*, George Steiner offers a comprehensive study on the subject of language and translation. Steiner’s premise rests on the assertion that all communication is a form of translation. He explores, in great detail, certain aspects that characterize poor translations and agrees with Benjamin that translations fail when they transmit too much information, which he explains in the following: “Their seeming accuracy

is limited to what is non-essential in the fabric of the original” (66). The translator may offer a clear, concise, and moving, but completely erroneous rendering. Sometimes, Steiner notes, “[t]he translator may be working in a context of decorum loftier than that of his author” (422). When this occurs, the translator sacrifices the sense of the original for his or her own interpretation. The following statement adequately summarizes his ruminations on this question:

A bad translation is one which is inadequate to its source-text for reasons which can be legion and obvious. The translator has misconstrued the original through ignorance, haste, or personal limitation. He lacks the mastery of his own language required for adequate representation. He has made a stylistic or psychological blunder in choosing his text: his own sensibility and that of the author whom he is translating are discordant. Where there is difficulty the bad translator elides or paraphrases. Where there is elevation he inflates. Where his author offends he smooths. (416–17)

In essence, Steiner attributes poor translation to the limitations or inadequacies of the translator, a point that speaks to the argument I am making here. These are manifested, as Steiner sees it, in errors of style and in errors of interpretation. Although occasional stylistic missteps are inevitable, a translation truly fails, as does the Scott-Bucleuch version of *Dom Casmurro*, when it consistently misinterprets and, consequently, misrepresents the source text. I will demonstrate in my analysis of the translations of Borges, Neruda, and Machado de Assis that the American receptions of these canonical Latin American authors have been affected

by the quality of their translations and that these can be charted along a critical spectrum, from very successful to outright failure.

Finally, as different texts call for “different exegetical tactics” (Lowe and Fitz xvii) there is no one ideal methodological approach to reading and analyzing translations, just as literary analysis, in general, calls for multiple critical reading techniques. In regards to translation analysis, Sayers Peden comments: “There is no scientific or objective way to judge a translation. There are only better and worse subjective methods.” She continues:

To dispose first of the worst, consider the favorite method of many—often academic—reviewers: spot vocabulary and syntax checks. The tunnel vision of these critics [...] overlooks the absurdly patent fact that languages do not develop with neat grammatical parallelism; neither do words that once have had the same core-meaning transfer to a different language their many connotations. (“Translating the Boom” 159)

It is my hope that in assessing these translations, I avoid the pitfall of being part of the “translation police” or a “Professor Horrendo”¹¹ and that I offer the English language reader a more measured, and more careful, guide for understanding the reliability of the translated text they are

¹¹ “Professor Horrendo” is an epithet Rabassa borrowed from Sara Blackburn, a publisher at Pantheon: “The bane of the translator, more often than not, is the critic who does know the other language; he is usually an academician who has done his homework and checked out the English against the original. If there is a mistake or a slip, he will surely find it, and he is not above suggesting alternate possibilities, some of which are as cogent as that exasperating last entry on multiple-choice exams, ‘None of these’” (“If This Be Treason” 27). See also, “The Ear in Translation” (82) or “You Can’t Say ‘Ain’t’ in Spanish” (122).

reading. According to Sayers Peden, the skillful translation critic possesses the following characteristics:

[A]n intimate knowledge of the original piece of literature, [...] familiarity with culture, geography, and history of the area from which that language emerges, and acquaintance with the corpus of the individual author's work. ("Translating the Boom" 160)

As a scholar of Spanish American and Brazilian literature, fluent in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, I am uniquely poised to analyze and assess the quality of these translations. With this linguistic and cultural background, I approach these texts in much the same way that the translator approaches the original. I break down a given passage into words and phrases, analyzing the lexicon, syntax, and grammar, with a special emphasis on style, namely diction, tone, and euphony. Each translation tends to dictate the specific analytical tools I employ. After this kind of close reading, however, Rabassa presents us with another point to ponder: "What makes one version better than another after the accuracy of both has been established?" He continues:

It can only be a felicitous choice of words and structure which not only conveys the meaning in English but enhances it by reserving the tone of the original. Tone has many meanings, but most often it is associated, figuratively at least, with sound ("Ear" 85)

We return to the issue of tone, which, as we have seen, is perhaps the most difficult aspect of language to translate and, consequently, the one that poses significant challenges in assessing its replication in translation. At this point, we must turn back to the original text. By

highlighting the translator's reading of the original text, as Sayers Peden observes, "we shall be able to extrapolate some generalizations that address the overall quality of their work" ("Translating the Boom" 164).

The issue of text selection always plagues the literary scholar. Just as the translator ultimately must choose between numerous linguistic and lexical options, the critic also has to select the most representative texts that support his thesis. I decided against, for example, analyzing the first English translation of *Pedro Páramo* by Juan Rulfo,¹² or Carlos Fuentes's *Cambio de piel* (*A Change of Skin*),¹³ both highly regarded and

¹² In 1959, Grove published the first English version of *Pedro Páramo*, translated by Lysander Kemp. When Susan Sontag met with Rulfo, shortly before his death, he expressed his hope to see "an accurate and uncut English translation" ("Foreword" x). Apparently, Kemp makes frequent mistakes in regards to verb tense and the subjunctive mood. As Dillman points out, he also supplies "the names of characters where the source text does not," which strips the novel of much of its purposeful textual ambiguity. Kemp's version also cuts portions from the novel, skipping sentences, or combining two or more sentences, "which results in wordier exchanges than the Spanish offers." Dillman states: "With the elimination of so much text, Kemp necessarily cuts out much repetition and thus in turn reduces the impact of much of the dialogue in the novel." Nevertheless, he does not completely fail in transmitting the sparse atmosphere of the original: "It must be said, however, that although Kemp misses the effect created by repetition, his translation captures the tone of the original very effectively. The dialogues, while incomplete, are convincing without fail" (Dillman 1202). Nevertheless, people read this severely flawed version for nearly four decades until Sayers Peden's complete, and more accurate, translation appeared in 1994. We simply cannot ascertain to what extent Kemp's "failed" translation affected Rulfo's reception in the United States as a Boom writer.

¹³ Lowe and Fitz briefly comment on the reception of the English translation of *Cambio de piel*, stating: "In Sam Hileman's translation, a disparity sometimes arises between the novel's very serious thematic intentions and the linguistic vehicle that seeks to convey these. To be fair, one should note that the same tension between the novel's content and its language exists in the original, though it is also true that Mr. Hileman's heroic attempts to resolve this perhaps irresolvable dilemma may raise more hackles than it soothes, and that, in essence, is the nature of the translation problem here" (39). According to Anthony West's 1968 *New Yorker* review, which Lowe and Fitz cite, *A Change of Skin* "is something quite different from *Cambio de piel* [...] the reader who wants to find out what Carlos Fuentes does with his elaborately crafted structure and with his sinister theme is not going to get much help from the American version of the book" (73, 75). Lowe and Fitz point out that, in his concluding remarks, West speaks "to the larger question of translation's crucial role in the development of inter-American

influential novels. In addition, Borges is not the only Latin American author that assisted in the process of translating his work into English. Suzanne Jill Levine, in her study *The Subversive Scribe*, for example, offers a detailed and illuminating reading of her participation with Guillermo Cabrera Infante in translating *Tres tristes tigres* (*Three Trapped Tigers*). Nevertheless, no study to date examines María Luisa Bombal's English version of *La amortajada* (*The Shrouded Woman*), which she translated herself.¹⁴ Likewise, there is little scholarship dedicated to João Ubaldo Ribeiro's self-translated version of *Viva o povo brasileiro* (*The Invincible Memory*).¹⁵ Finally, three Brazilian titles, *O cortiço*, *Macunaíma*, and *Grande sertão: veredas*, deserve their own chapters, yet I include

literature as a field" (40). West states: "It is more than unfortunate that this very distinguished Mexican writer's work should be presented to the American public in such a fashion, and this remarkable translation is symbolic of the tragedy of incomprehension and misunderstanding which constitutes the history of the relationship between the Gothic North and the Latin South on this continent. Even when we listen to what our neighbors say, we do not bother to make sure that we understand the words they use" (75).

¹⁴ The case of Bombal presents a fascinating situation for comparative translation analysis. When the author translated *La amortajada* (1938) into English as *The Shrouded Woman* (1948), she significantly expanded and rewrote the original, removing poetic passages and incorporating elements of her short story "La historia de María Griselda" (Infanger 67–68). One should approach *The Shrouded Woman*, therefore, as a distinct and separate, albeit related, text.

¹⁵ David Treece, in his review of *An Invisible Memory*, discusses the author's difficulty in mastering the various registers: "Ribeiro is good at conveying into English the rhetorical language of his heroes' appeals to national liberation, and the epic scale of the drama in which they are swept along. However, this is not matched by his command of the colloquial register; as a result, the 'ordinary' characters too often lack the sense of authenticity and humanity which might make their journey of self-discovery convincing" (145). Luiz Fernando Valente, in a glowing review, also comments on the limitations of Ribeiro's translation: "The few flaws in the translation, such as an occasional instance of awkward syntax or stilted diction, should be attributed to the fact that English is not Ribeiro's native language. They are hardly noticeable once one becomes engrossed in the reading of his excellent novel" (289).

them as part of my concluding comments on the general state of translation and the reception of Brazilian literature in the United States. I hope that this study will serve as a guide and example to future scholars who will offer new and fascinating approaches to the role of translation in the reception and influence in the emerging field of inter-American literature, a field being forged largely by Latin Americanists interested in the growing cultural exchanges between Spanish America, Brazil, the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean.

It is my hope, therefore, to enter into critical dialogue with the increasingly growing field of comparative Latin American and inter-American literature, using translation as a critical apparatus to access these literary texts as well as responses to them. The rest of this introduction is dedicated to a brief discussion on the role of translation in the development of the Boom, a critical period in which the United States experienced a tremendous influx of Latin American literature translated into English.

Translation and the Rise of the Boom

In order to appreciate fully the ways in which publishers contracted, translated, published, and promoted works of Spanish American and Brazilian literature in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, we must first examine the historical, political, social, cultural, and economic antecedents. During the 1940s and 1950s, Roosevelt's

Good Neighbor Policy encouraged an enthusiastic exchange between the United States and Latin America. Through the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, Nelson Rockefeller promoted the study of Spanish and Portuguese, cultural conferences, and translations of works as an anti-Nazi ploy during World War II. Waldo Frank and Blanche and Alfred Knopf promoted Latin American literature before, during, and after World War II. Likewise, the bilingual magazine *The Plumed Horn / El Corno Emplumado* also sought to bring attention to Latin American avant-garde poetry. Publishers received financial support as an incentive to visit Latin America, view its literary scene, and publish works in translation. Notable translations include: *Anguish* by Graciliano Ramos (1936), *Broad and Alien Is the World* by Ciro Alegría (1941), *Twelve Spanish American Poets* (1943), *Anthology of Contemporary Latin American Poetry* (1941), and *The Violent Land* by Jorge Amado (1945) (Rostagno xv). Alfred and Blanche Knopf, in particular, continued to publish works of Latin American literature, even after the Good Neighbor policy and government funding waned. It was through translation, therefore, that American readers were introduced to Spanish American and Brazilian literature. As Lowe and Fitz state:

Translation is the mechanism that has allowed the literary cultures of Spanish America and Brazil to overcome the cultural solitude, born of disrespect, that had so long plagued them and inhabited their recognition by their hemispheric neighbors and by the world audience generally. (25)

Only during the later half of the twentieth century, specifically during the Boom years of the 1960s, did North American intellectuals, publishers, writers, and readers, in general, begin to revisit their long-held misperceptions of Latin America. The watershed moment that brought the South to the attention of the North occurred just 90 miles off the coast of Key West, Florida.

Three key historical events brought Cuba, and by extension all of Spanish America, to the center stage of world politics: the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the Bay of Pigs Invasion (*Playa Girón*) in 1961, and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Other episodes of political strife, such as the US occupation of the Dominican Republic from 1965 to 1966, Pinochet's coup d'état of Allende in Chile in 1973, and the *Guerra Sucia* in the 1970s, as well as guerrilla violence in various Latin American countries, contributed to the tension in the Americas, particularly between the United States and the Spanish-speaking countries, though later also between the United States and Brazil. These political events, coupled with the rise of the middle class and the modernization and industrialization of the metropolis, influenced writers and intellectuals throughout Latin America. The triumph of the Cuban Revolution brought hope to these writers and in many ways galvanized their political and aesthetic agendas, affording them a sense of collective identity. William Luis, in "Culture as Text," states:

At the outset of the Revolution, Cuba received the support of many intellectuals, including authors who would soon be

associated with the Boom. In turn, the Castro government promoted writers who were sympathetic to the Revolution and some of them became international figures. (8)

Likewise, González Echevarría, in “Criticism and Literature in Revolutionary Cuba,” sees the Cuban Revolution as a watershed moment in Latin American literature and culture:

The Cuban Revolution is the dividing line in contemporary Latin American literature, a literature of before the revolution and one of after the revolution. This can be verified by looking at the careers of major contemporary authors [...]. Aside from individual cases, the whole tenor and tempo of cultural activity changes after 1959, not only because of what Cuba does, but also because of what is done elsewhere in reaction to Cuba. (154)

Rodríguez Monegal reminds us, “A veces se olvida (involuntariamente, tal vez) que el triunfo de la Revolución Cubana es uno de los factores determinantes del *boom*” (*Boom* 18). The artistic movements that accompanied the sociopolitical revolution in Cuba, and the US government’s reaction, set the stage for what would become known as the Boom.

Luis highlights *Lunes de Revolución*, the literary supplement of *Revolución*—the official newspaper of the July 26 Movement that brought Fidel Castro to power—as “the most widely read literary supplement in the history of Cuban and Latin American literatures.”¹⁶ Even though it only ran for just under three years (23 March 1959 to 6 November 1961), *Lunes de Revolución* “started with a circulation of 100,000 and

¹⁶ “The newspaper was edited by one of Castro’s advisors, Carlos Franqui, and the supplement by Guillermo Cabrera Infante and assistant editor Pablo Armando Fernández” (Luis, “Exhuming” 254). See also Luis’s *Lunes de Revolución* (2003).

surpassed 250,000, greater than other comparable publications of larger countries, including the U.S.'s *New York Review of Books*" ("Exhuming" 254). Rodríguez Monegal mentions *Casa de las Américas* as another example of academic criticism that was, for several years, "el centro revolucionario de la cultura latinoamericana" (18).¹⁷ In response to the American blockade, Spanish American intellectuals participated in "un permanente intercambio, [de] viajes y Congresos, manifiestos, coediciones y números de homenaje," which fostered "una verdadera revolución en toda América Latina" (*Boom* 20). González Echevarría observes:

Beginning with the early sixties, Cuba offered Latin American writers incentives such as literary prizes and opportunities to work in Cuba, as well as magazines and publishing houses. ("Criticism and Literature" 154–55)

Although the Cuban Revolution served as a catalyst in organizing and unifying certain literary goals, Spanish American intellectuals lost their euphoric affinity with the "Cuban inspirational myth" in 1971 when hardened party policies forced Cuban poet Heberto Padilla to reject his "decadent and deviant views" (Pope 229). Rodríguez-Monegal suggests, however, that without this initial ideological and cultural surge brought about by the Cuban Revolution the literary movement we call the Boom may not have occurred:

¹⁷ González Echevarría also includes *Universidad de La Habana, Islas, Santiago, Unión, L/L*, as well as other prominent academic and journalistic publications, which developed because of the revolution ("Criticism and Literature 159–61).

No es éste un *boom* capitalista, promovido por industriales y publicistas; es un *boom* ideológico, promovido por un pequeño país sitiado peor que tiene el apoyo internacional del mundo socialista y que en toda América Latina se basa en la izquierda culturalmente poderosísima del continente. Sin este *boom* [...], el otro, el que todos comentan, tal vez no hubiera llegado a ocurrir, o no habría tenido la misma repercusión. (*Boom* 22)

Certainly, the Cuban Revolution brought Latin American politics, culture—and consequently, literature—to the attention of the United States government and cultural managers. González Echevarría summarizes the US reaction to this increased visibility:

Only after 1959 did the United States begin to invest aggressively in the area of Latin American culture. The creation of many Latin American studies centers in US universities came as a response to Cuban cultural activity, and large-scale projects—including the financing of literary journals—channeled resources into the cultural area in a way that had a crucial bearing on the creation of the new Latin American literature of the sixties. (“Criticism and Literature” 154)¹⁸

At the same time, however, change was afoot throughout the Hispanic world, independent of the activities of the North. The rapid development and expansion of publishing houses in Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, and Spain—especially Seix Barral in Barcelona—and the proliferation of culture and literary magazines, such as *Lunes de Revolución*, *Casa*, *Primera Plana*, and *Mundo Nuevo*, aided in the dissemination of *la nueva literatura hispanoamericana* throughout Europe and Latin America.

¹⁸ Luis also reminds us of “the formation of translation centers and programs” (“Culture” 9) during this period, such as the one housed at Binghamton University, under the directorship of Marilyn Gaddis Rose.

The term *Boom*, was coined in the late 1960s to describe the explosive proliferation of Spanish American literature on the international and, specifically, US literary markets. For the most part, I support Maarten Steenmeijer's recent comments on this concept, especially within the framework of the reception and influence of Latin American literature in the United States:

[T]he evocative power of the very term makes it suitable to refer to what was indeed a boom: the "explosively" increasing interest in Spanish American literature in the Spanish-speaking world, in Europe, and in the United States of America. It was a striking phenomenon, for in a relatively short period Spanish American literature gained sufficient prestige to be considered world literature, in spite of the weak economic position of the subcontinent, in spite of the persistent prejudices about its people and its culture, and in spite of the language barriers. (145)

Nevertheless, I recognize the inherent risks in using a homogenizing term for such a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. Therefore, I am not specifically concerned with the Boom as a period concept due to the heterogeneous nature of the style, theme, and content of the numerous works produced during this timeframe. Again, I echo Steenmeijer:

The main problem is that it has at least two frames of reference: it refers to the *production* and to the *reception* of Spanish American literature (in particular, the novel). But even within these frames the term is susceptible to confusion. Does, for example, the production exclusively bear on works published for the first time in the sixties [...]? Or does it also involve works published in the preceding decades that were only "discovered" and distributed on a wide scale in the sixties [...]? As for the production, does the term exclusively apply to Spanish originals or also to translations? As for the reception, it is not clear whether the term should only be applied to the sudden increase in

interest in contemporary Spanish American literature and its subsequent overnight celebrity, or if it covers as well intrinsic literary qualities and even has value as a period concept, as some scholars seem to assume. (144)

Within the context of this study, therefore, the Boom refers to the literary production of originals and translations, both contemporary and “discovered” texts, received in the United States in the 1960s and early 1970s. I focus specifically on the reception of the English translations of Borges, Neruda, and Machado de Assis that were appearing, and then on the subsequent influence they had on the US literary establishment—authors, critics, academics, and the general readership.

Throughout the 1960s, the United States government created a number of programs and research centers, as previously mentioned, to reach out to the Spanish American intelligentsia during this period in order to quell anti-American sentiment. Kennedy said the following to the founding members of the Inter-American Committee:

We don't want to see the artistic and intellectual life used as a weapon in a cold war struggle, but we do feel that it is an essential part of the whole democratic spirit [...] The artist necessarily must be a free man. (qtd. in Cohn, “Tale” 139)

In 1962 the Inter-American Foundation for the Arts (IAFA) was established, led by Rodman Rockefeller. As a private institution IAFA had no visible links to Washington D.C. Yet, “the context within which IAFA was inscribed,” according to Mudrovic, “smacked of Cold War ideology” (133). “Though never overtly stated,” according to Rostagno, “the intention behind IAFA was to counteract the impact of Cuba’s cultural

revolution on Latin intellectuals” (103). In order to open a dialogue with these intellectuals, IAFA hosted a series of Inter-American symposia in the Bahamas (1962), Puerto Rico (1963), Chichén Itzá (1963), and Puerto Azul, Venezuela (1967) (Mudrovic 133). These conferences achieved little in regards to the symposia, yet they were “highly successful in bringing together Latin American and US writers, critics, and publishers, [encouraging] delegates to participate in a free and relaxed discussion,” always in English, “on inter-American matters, artistic and political” (Rostagno 104–05). The Latin American authors that participated in these conferences increased their exposure to “prominent American writers, accredited publishers, and key figures in the New York establishment” (Mudrovic 134) and thus increased their social capital, which would prove indispensable in courting success in the United States. Carlos Fuentes is a prime example of the success of this inter-American cultural exchange.

In addition to these conferences, IAFA attempted to establish a grant program and center that subsidized translations of Latin American literature. Nevertheless, the IAFA, “under heavy attack by the Organization of American States, and aware that its cultural agency was having only limited impact,” the IAFA redefined its role, “merging in 1967 to become known as the Center for Inter-American Relations,” (134). The center, led by David Rockefeller, assimilated the IAFA and its translation program, which “became the starting point for the one of the most

successful programs with which the Center for Inter-American Relations was identified for a long time” (134).¹⁹ They established a structure to train translators and then match them with authors, texts, and publishers. A committee composed of professors, writers, critics, and translators—including Rodríguez Monegal, Rabassa, and Reid—oversaw the selection process. The Center served as a literary broker, as Mudrovcic observes, and oversaw much of the complex publication process:

As an institution, it selected the titles to be translated, paid the translation fees, provided the translators, guided its protégés through the New York publicity and editorial structure, worked to guarantee a successful reception and a good selling rate, and even paid airfare, if writers couldn’t afford to travel to a promotional event. (137)

The Center also established the literary journal *Review*, which introduced the US literary establishment to the rising generation of Spanish American writers through a series of interviews, scholarly articles, and even contributions by the authors themselves, such as Puig, Donoso, and Cabrera Infante. The journal included “focus” sections that took a closer look at newly translated texts. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, for example, was one of the first to be featured. Certainly the Center’s “intervention and patronage” has helped shape the landscape of “what is now—rightly or wrongly, accurately or not—called ‘Latin American

¹⁹ See also Rostagno 106–07. Cohn, in “A Tale of Two Translation Programs,” examines an overlooked program that was also funded by the Rockefeller family: the Association of American University Presses, which published works by Borges, Garro, Machado de Assis, Martí, Paz, Ramos, Rulfo, etc. (143–47). Cohn also discusses the political and ideological forces behind US involvement in Latin American translation and the development of the Boom.

literature' in the United States" (Mudrovic 139–40). For some Latin American writers success resulted from a combination of strong publicity and positive reviews of good translations. For other writers, it took years to break into the US market despite their regional prominence or their recognition in Europe, and some never fully achieved the same measure of success in the United States as their contemporaries.²⁰ In order to demonstrate the crucial role of translation in literary success, let us briefly examine the cases of Sábato's *On Heroes and Tombs* (1961, trans. 1981) and Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (1963, trans. 1966).

Sábato's "prestige in Latin America ranked with Borges and Cortázar" (Rostagno 135). In 1950, the formidable Harriet de Onís translated *El túnel* (1948) for Knopf as *The Outsider* (1950). Sábato's magnum opus, *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (1961), however, did not appear in English until 1981. Looking to capitalize on the publicity and success of Borges and Fuentes, the translation rights were purchased in 1969. Rostagno explains: "Almost five years later, owing to some unexplained disagreement, [the publisher] unilaterally canceled the contract" despite the fact it received "outstanding reviews" in Buenos Aires and Europe. Sábato attributed this cancellation to Patricia Emigh's inadequate translation and not to his work. Several years later, the Center for Inter-

²⁰ Miguel Angel Asturias, for instance, never quite achieved full Boom status in the United States. John Leonard, critic for the *The New York Times*, summarily dismissed him as "a Guatemalan windbag" who "inexplicably won the Nobel Prize" (qtd. in Mudrovic 139).

American Relations, at Ronald Christ's behest, reacquired the rights and charged Helen Lane with its translation (Rostagno 135).²¹ Nonetheless, all the important publishers turned it down. It was finally published in 1981, but to little fanfare. Edwin McDowell dedicated the majority of his *New York Times* review to "denouncing the long and troublesome process the book went through before it could be published in the United States" (Mudrovic 129). To this day, Sábato remains in the shadows of his compatriots and contemporaries. While most critics do not consider Sábato a Boom author, per se, there is no question that the lack of recognition in the American literary community was due in part to the unfortunate combination of an initial poor translation and indifferent publishers.

The case of Cortázar's *Rayuela* (1963) lies in stark contrast to the experience of Sábato. Because of the lukewarm reception of *The Winners* (*Los premios*, 1960) in 1965, Pantheon was reluctant to translate and publish *Rayuela*. With the encouragement of Sara Blackburn, coupled with the praise from critics in Latin America and Europe, Pantheon acquiesced. Blackburn, impressed with his work in *The Odyssey Review*, contracted Rabassa for the translation.²² According to Rostagno, Rabassa had a "superb ear for the novel's wordplay and innuendos" (127). Rabassa admits that he translated the book as he read it (*Treason* 51),

²¹ See also Mudrovic's discussion of Sábato (129–30).

²² See Rabassa, *If This Be Treason* (51–55), on his experience translating *Rayuela*.

but the result, *Hopscotch*, ended up winning the first National Book Award for translation in 1967 (Lowe and Fitz 139). While critics and academics praised *Hopscotch*, it initially saw limited appeal in the United States. In spite of these setbacks, Cortázar, his publishers, and Rabassa persevered and many now recognize him as one of the preeminent figures of the Boom. The cases of Sábato and Cortázar demonstrate the tremendous influence publishers and translators had on the proliferation and reception of Latin American literature in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s.

Carlos Fuentes, for example, was one of the first major participants of the Boom to crack the US market. We can contribute part of his success to his ability to cultivate “his culture’s rich indigenous past while at the same time developing a distinctly inter-American perspective in his work” (Lowe and Fitz 37). According to Rostagno, Fuentes “was deliberate and unrelenting in his efforts to smash his way into New York’s intellectual circles” (12). He realized early on that “American recognition was the most crucial, and profitable, step in the process of dissemination of Latin American letters” (121). His international upbringing and his cosmopolitan lifestyle afforded him the ability to hobnob with American intellectuals, while his leftist politics and cultural upbringing helped him move among the intellectual circles in Latin America. Gabriel García Márquez benefited immensely from Fuentes’s position of power and influence in the literati. Even as García Márquez was finishing *Cien años*

de soledad, Fuentes was telling critics to expect a masterpiece. García Márquez selected Rabassa as translator at the behest of Cortázar, even though this meant he had to wait several months for Rabassa's schedule to open up.²³ The wait was well worth it. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* "received euphoric acclaim" and it continues to sell well (Rostagno 124). Publishers and critics were quick to latch on to the unique blend of the magic and the real in this work and others.²⁴ Magical realism, a cultural and literary tendency Carpentier first called *lo real maravilloso*, eventually became a "marketing brand that would help the sale of Spanish American novels abroad" (Pope 249). This (mis)reading of Spanish American literature had a homogenizing effect on the US perception—or distortion, as Payne remarks—of Latin American culture, in general.

Other major Boom authors, such as Julio Cortázar and Mario Vargas Llosa, experienced a slower rise to fame and recognition in the United States. Even though Rabassa won the National Book Award for *Hopscotch*, it did not gain wide readership when first published. Cortázar and his publishers persevered throughout the 1970s, and in 1980 his luck turned with Joyce Carol Oates's glowing review of *A Change of Light* in the *New York Times Book Review* (Rostagno 128). Like Cortázar, it took

²³ "García Márquez wanted me to do his book but at the moment I was tied up with Miguel Ángel Asturias's 'banana trilogy.' Cortázar told Gabo to wait, which he did, to the evident satisfaction of all concerned" (Rabassa, *If This Be Treason* 51).

²⁴ See Payne's discussion of "realismo mágico" and the reception of García Márquez in the United States (17–19, 24–28).

Vargas Llosa nearly fifteen years of constant literary output to establish his presence in the United States, and, in the end, this was achieved almost solely on the quality of his texts that were translated into English. Borges is another figure whose rise in popularity and marketability took years to achieve, a story of reception that I will explore in greater detail in the first chapter. Nevertheless, the pioneering efforts of Fuentes, Cortázar, García Márquez, Vargas Llosa, and Borges opened the doors to young novelists like Puig, Sarduy, and Cabrera Infante. The Brazilian novelists, however, did not fare as well as their Spanish American counterparts. Although translations of varying quality appeared during this same time period, authors such as Machado de Assis, João Guimarães Rosa, and Clarice Lispector were not well known and, consequently, not as well received as the Boom writers of Spanish America. In the conclusion, I will return to the issue of translation and the reception and influence of Brazilian literature in the United States.

We have observed that the development of the Boom “was both a literary and a marketing phenomenon that was characterized by a dramatic increase in the publication, translation, and distribution of Latin American literature” (Cohn, “Tale” 140). We have also observed that certain authors gained immediate support based on their efforts at self-promotion. Along with the increased role of the author, the Boom witnessed “the rise to power of professionals such as literary agents and editors who worked closely to maximize authors’ success in the market”

(140). The ideological coherence of Latin American intellectuals and authors, based on their support of the Cuban Revolution, also characterizes the Boom movement. Politics played a significant role in the formation of the Boom, especially when considering the various US organizations and committees devoted to translating, publishing, and promoting Latin American literature after the Cuban Revolution. In addition to politics, the reception and influence of a given work depends on other dynamics that are largely beyond the control of the author and even of the publisher, as Armstrong explains:

Both the gestation and the reception of the literary work contribute to the production of the cultural object, predicated on a dynamic relation between author and reader, and mediated by everything from publisher's marketing strategies to abstract elements of influence such as the cultural education, values, and expectations of the audience. (*Third World* 13)

For good or for ill, publishers marketed many of the authors of the Boom as magical realists, even though the critical understanding of the tendency was largely defined and applied *a posteriori*.²⁵ We can see that authors like Isabel Allende and Laura Esquivel have been able to capitalize on the success of their magic realist forefathers. It has taken authors like Alberto Fuguet and Edmundo Paz Soldán, as well as other McOndo authors or the Crack generation, to show that not all contemporary Latin American literature is “flying *abuelitas*” and

²⁵ As late as 1994, critics were still defining the basic aesthetic and thematic characteristics of the Boom, and many were quick to apply the “magical realism” label to all Latin American literature. Although it was an important attribute, it certainly was not the only one. See Shaw, “Which Was the First Novel of the Boom?”

“obsessively constructed genealogies” (Fuguet, “I Am Not a Magic Realist!”). In the case of Amado, a point to which I return in the Conclusion, his work fit within and reinforced the paradigms of the “cultural education, values, and expectations” that the American audience had of Brazil.

Translation and cultural production theorist André Lefevere states the following concerning these extraliterary factors that dictate the reception of literature: “It is my contention that the process resulting in the acceptance or rejection, canonization or noncanonization of literary works is dominated [by] issues such as power, ideology, institution, and manipulation” (*Translation, Rewriting* 2). These particular factors deserve a separate treatment in regards to translation and the rise of the Boom, but we can recapitulate key factors of our study according to Lefevere’s assessment. We have seen how systems of patronage have promoted, supported, and sustained the propagation of Latin American literature in the United States. On one hand, it is fair to say the translation of the Boom may never have happened if it had not been for publishing pioneers like the Knopfs, and Frank before them, or for the translation centers sponsored by institutions, such as the IAFA and later the CIAR and AAUP. On the other hand, the publishing phenomenon may have never occurred without the ideological tension sparked by the Cuban Revolution. All of these factors influenced the production, marketing, and sale of the literary product. Moreover, manipulation also occurs at the

level of translation when linguistic considerations enter into conflict with considerations of an aesthetic or ideological nature. The latter tend to win out. Without question, the issues of power, ideology, institution, and manipulation affect the translating process and the subsequent reception of translations. At times, I will reference the various extraliterary factors that come into play in the reception and influence of key Latin American works in English translation. Nevertheless, the primary focus of this study is on the actual translations and not necessarily on the process of creation and marketing.

With this understanding of the Boom, as perceived from the United States literary establishment, it is now possible to examine in detail specific cases of reception and influence of translations. By studying the continuum of translation, from success to “failure,” as exhibited in these representative examples of Borges, Neruda, and Machado, this dissertation situates the role of translation in the larger framework of inter-American literature. With the emergence of this new field of study, readers in the United States need to know more about the quality of the translations they are reading. My dissertation is a significant addition to a growing body of criticism that will help current and future scholars consider the effects of translation on the reception and influence of Spanish American and Brazilian literature in the United States.

CHAPTER I

REWRITING BORGES IN ENGLISH

This chapter has two purposes: first, to discuss the overwhelmingly positive critical reception of Jorge Luis Borges in the United States during the Boom; second, to analyze the collaborative translation efforts of Norman Thomas di Giovanni with the author in *The Aleph and Other Stories: 1933–1969*. These translations, published in 1970, sparked some controversy shortly after their publication, especially among the US academic community. While the question remains moot, we will see that by the early 1970s the author’s own aesthetic sensibilities moved toward a much more straightforward and direct style than what was found in his prose and poetry in the preceding two decades. I will argue that the Borges and di Giovanni methodology of rewriting and improving upon the original Spanish texts actually reinforced Borges’s long-held notions of translation, which he explored in several essays and presented with acute clarity in his first *ficción*, “Pierre Menard, autor del Quixote.” If we judge *The Aleph and Other Stories* based on Borges’s own criteria, then these translations constitute a resounding triumph.¹ The first example of translation success is found in

¹ In *Invisible Work*, Efraín Kristal explains: “Borges never wrote a fully elaborated treatise on translation.” Nevertheless, “his views on translation remained fairly constant after the 1930s, and it would be possible to construe an approach, even a doctrine, on

“Pedro Salvadores.” Borges and di Giovanni rewrote it, inserting subtle changes, so that American readers could understand the various historical and cultural references taken for granted by an Argentine readership. Next, by comparing and contrasting different English versions of “Las ruinas circulares” we will see how di Giovanni and Borges succeed in recasting these texts in English, even when that required substantial rewriting. If there is any “failure” to be found in this collaborative effort, it had no perceptible negative affect on Borges’s reception in the United States. If anything, it propelled Borges even further into the heights of critical acclaim because many viewed these translations as authoritative and definitive due to his participation as co-translator. Therefore, *The Aleph and Other Stories* provides a strong

the basis of his general observations” (30–31). (See also Sergio Waisman’s study, *Borges and Translation*.) Borges specifically explores these views in “Las dos maneras de traducir” (1926), “Las versiones homéricas” (1932), and “Los traductores de *Las 1001 Noches*” (1935). In these essays, Borges reinforces specific points. First, a translation is not inferior to the original. Second, the idea of a definitive text is fallacious. Third, it is the translator’s prerogative to transform and even improve the original, if possible. Borges did not privilege an original text over its multiple translations, seeing them all as drafts of some greater literary expression. In several cases, the least literal rendering, in his opinion, was the best. As a translator, he frequently corrected and improved the source text, especially his own *ficciones*. Waisman provides the most detailed analysis of these essays, situating them within a framework of contemporary translation theory, in chapter 2, “Borges on Translation: The Development of a Theory” (41–83). The existing bibliography on Borges and translation, which is far from exhaustive, includes: Aparicio’s *Versiones, interpretaciones, creaciones* (107–48); Arrojo’s “Translation, Transference, and the Attraction to Otherness—Borges, Menard, Whitman;” Barcia’s “Borges y la traducción;” Bravo’s “Borges el traductor;” Costa’s “Borges, the Original of the Translation;” Danielson’s “Borges on Translation;” Gargatagli and López Guix’s “Ficciones y teorías en la traducción;” Louisor’s “Borges and Translation;” Olea Franco’s “Borges y el civilizado arte de la traducción;” Pastormerlo’s “Borges y la traducción;” and Willson’s “La fundación vanguardista de la traducción.”

example of translation success, which establishes one end of the translation spectrum being discussed in this dissertation.

The US Reception of Borges

Over two decades after his passing, in a time when Latin American literature is recognized positively in academia, Jorge Luis Borges's belated reception in the United States may be difficult to comprehend, especially when we consider his tremendous impact on world literature, and the development of inter-American literature, in the second half of the twentieth century. In fact, Rodríguez Monegal, in his literary biography of Borges, calls him "the first Latin American writer to be recognized worldwide" (444). Yet, Borges's late reception in the United States was in large part due to American parochialism, in spite of "the cosmopolitanism of Latin American literature" (Lowe and Fitz, *Translation* 29). In the late 1960s Rodríguez Monegal criticized prejudiced American critics who refused to recognize the value of Latin American literature, pointing out the disparities between Europe and the United States:

The painful contrast with what is now happening in Europe makes the situation here all the more noteworthy. In France, Italy, Spain and even England, people are quoting Borges at every turn (sometimes without any special reason) [...]. Here in the United States things are different. ("Literature" 3)

In order to appreciate the magnitude of Borges's reception in the United States, however, one must first understand the singular brilliance he offered to Spanish American letters. Fuentes calls Borges "el primer gran narrador plenamente urbano de América Latina" because the *ficciones* of

Borges served as a source of inspiration for *la nueva novela hispanoamericana* (*La nueva novela* 25).² Borges rewrote and subverted the Spanish language by incorporating English, French, and cosmopolitan literary models. According to Suzanne Jill Levine, Borges drew the line between the old and the new by “revolutionizing the syntax of the Spanish language through his close readings of an extraordinary range of literary and linguistic influences.” In many ways, his literary Spanish was “Edwardian British in tone but American in wielding with concise economy a spare yet dense literary language” (306). At the same time as Borges pushed the creative limits of the Spanish language he also developed an innovative approach to fiction writing:

His *ficciones* were indeed a new hybrid genre of the short story—a challenging and dense fusion of detective plot, science fiction, metaphysical treatise, and magical poetry, blurring the ever more tenuous boundaries between reality and fiction within the confines of literature. (“The Latin American Novel” 305)

When critics and writers in the United States were introduced to Borges in English translation, they immediately recognized his singular brilliance. Writers such as John Updike and John Barth, as we will see, viewed Borges’s work as a source of inspiration in revitalizing American prose. Borges’s first publication in the United States, “The Garden of Forking Paths,” translated by Anthony Boucher, appeared in *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine* in 1940 and although several stories were

² See Jaime Alazraki’s “Borges and the New Latin-American Novel” in *Prose for Borges* (331–350). This essay was later included in *Critical Essays* (1987).

published over the next two decades, his presence in inter-American letters was nonexistent.³ Initially, Borges was overlooked and dismissed by both Waldo Frank and Blanche Knopf during their respective scouting trips to Latin America.⁴ As early as 1933, Waldo Frank called Borges “his generation’s finest stylist,” but he criticized him for “brazenly [devoting] his genius to a literature of fantasy and utter escape” (43). Frank, as Rostagno explains, “avoided anything that did not overtly deal with American landscape and folklore” (20). Borges did not, according to Levine, “represent’ the image of the Latin American writer that would entice American publishers” with “local color” and “folksy marks” of a regional writer (“The Latin American Novel” 299–300). Mrs. Knopf also overlooked Borges, selecting Eduardo Mallea “as the representative Argentina author,” which seems puzzling in retrospect. “Mallea’s local reputation and high visibility and Borges’s more private personality,” Rostagno observes, “may account for this oversight or preference.” She continues: “Perhaps the fact that Borges did not write novels and had not yet achieved the stature he would with *Ficciones* also explains why his work did not appear as attractive to the publisher” (33). Levine echoes Rostagno’s assessment: “Knopf’s rejection of Borges was symptomatic of

³ Donald Yates, in a special panel dedicated to translating Borges, gives a brief chronological overview of the publishing history of Borges in English (*Simply a Man of Letters* 241–45). See also the permission acknowledgments in *Labyrinths* for previously published stories, as well as Rodríguez Monegal’s literary biography on Borges.

⁴ See chapter 1, “Waldo Frank’s Crusade for Latin American Literature,” and chapter 2, “Blanche and Alfred Knopf’s Literary Roundup” in Irene Rostagno’s *Searching for Recognition*.

a patronizing English-speaking world unable to appreciate that something of great literary significance was brewing on the ground in Latin America” (“The Latin American Novel” 300).

In stark contrast to their American counterparts, French critics and publishers, such as Valéry Laubard and Roger Callois, embraced the cosmopolitan and unconventional style of Borges.⁵ Callois lived in Buenos Aires during World War II and he developed a friendship with Silvina Ocampo and the cadre of writers associated with *Sur*. He returned to Paris in 1946 and published Borges’s *Ficciones*, “[inaugurating] the Editions Gallimard series La Croix du Sud, which published exclusively Latin American writing in translation” (Rostagno 24). The French translations of Borges, highly successful both critically and commercially, propelled his career in Europe.⁶ Because of this increased visibility, his matchless talent was praised, culminating in winning the prestigious International Publishers’ Prize, the Prix Formentor, which he shared with Samuel Beckett in 1961. His fame in Europe caught the

⁵ The French were particularly interested in Borges because they saw his prose as a creative manifestation of structuralist theories that were en vogue in France at the time. Fitz calls Borges “the quintessential structuralist writer, as the writer who actually put the abstruse theories of structuralism into fiction, or, more precisely, into *ficciones*” (*Translation* 185). Lindstrom echoes this sentiment: “French critics of the structuralist and poststructuralist eras were quick to claim Borges as support for their assertions about the conventional patterns human beings use to organize information, whether that provided by a literary work or knowledge about society and the natural world” (83).

⁶ The French translations, however, are not without their detractors. Kristal notes that many critics and translators deplore Nestor Ibarra’s verse translations of Borges, as well as the literal renderings of *Ficciones* by Callois. Albert Bensoussan, recognizing Borges’s own endorsement of Ibarra’s translations, considers them “to be dishonest transpositions that take unwarranted liberties with the original” (*Invisible Work* 13). See Bensoussan’s “Traducir al francés la poesía de Borges” (203–06).

attention of US publishers and he was finally translated and dispersed widely in English after years of relative obscurity in the United States (Lowe and Fitz 184).⁷ By the middle of the 1960s, Borges was the critical darling of the academic community,⁸ in spite of any perceived shortcomings in early translations. Rodríguez Monegal speaks to the quality of these early translations: “Some of his English translators had been too literal and thus had come across insoluble problems” (*Literary Biography* 459). Nonetheless, Borges was garnering glowing reviews from established writers and critics, such as John Updike, John Barth, John

⁷ Grove published *Ficciones*, translated by Alastair Reid and Anthony Kerrigan, and New Directions released *Labyrinths*, “put together by Michigan State University professor of Spanish Donald Yates and Princeton University professor of Spanish and Latin American literature James Irby” (Rostagno 116). *Dreamtigers*, published two years later by University of Texas Press, further solidified Borges’s presence in US literature. Because my study focuses specifically on the reception of a single collection, *The Aleph and Other Stories: 1933–1969*, I will not discuss the reviews of the other volumes that appeared around the same time. In the interest of bibliographical completeness, however, here is a list of several reviews of *Labyrinths*, *Ficciones*, and *Dreamtigers*: Mildred Adams, “Miniatures of a Giant,” *New York Times* (27 May 1962); “Books: Greatest in Spanish,” *Time* (22 Jun. 1962); Paul de Man, “A Modern Master,” *New York Review of Books* (19 Nov. 1964); “Pick of the Paperbacks,” *Saturday Review* (20 Mar. 1965); Alex Hamilton, “Gay Procession: A Survey of the Month,” *Books and Bookmen* (Mar. 1965); Judith Merrill, “Books,” *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (Oct. 1965); John Updike, “The Author as Librarian,” *The New Yorker* (30 Oct. 1965); John Barth, “A Gift of Books,” *Holiday* (1966); “Fiction: The Decade’s Most Notable Books,” *Time*, (26 Dec. 1969); Colin Wilson, “Borges and Nostalgia,” *Books and Bookmen* (Aug. 1973).

⁸ Borges’s reception by the academic community was accelerated by a lengthy trip to the United States that began on September 10, 1961. Williamson details this trip: “He was invited by the Edward Larocque Tinker Foundation to spend a semester as a visiting professor at the University of Texas at Austin, where he would give readings and teach a course on Argentine literature. [...] He was to stay in the United States for nearly six months, returning to Buenos Aires on February 25, 1962. He visited New Mexico and California and gave lectures at Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and at the Library of Congress and the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C.” (347).

Ashbery, William Gass, Alfred Kazin, Paul de Man, and George Steiner.⁹ Updike, in “The Author as Librarian,” expressed his hope that Borges could aid in what Lowe and Fitz call the “literary resuscitation” of North American literature (10), which he found stagnant at the time, by inspiring writers that were “blocked.” He states:

The question is, I think, whether or not Borges’s lifework [...] can serve, in its gravely considered oddity, as any kind of clue to the way out of the dead-end narcissism and downright trashiness of present American fiction. (62)

Borges’s sensibility to the inherent fictionality of fiction, in Updike’s estimation, brought a refreshing approach that answered “to a deep need in contemporary fiction—the need to confess the fact of artifice” (77).

John Barth, in his seminal essay “The Literature of Exhaustion,” which first appeared in *Atlantic* in August 1967, expands upon Updike’s observations and discusses the “used-upness of certain forms or exhaustion of certain possibilities” in fiction (64). Barth admits that Borges’s *ficciones*, read in translation, served as a source of inspiration for American writers by providing a model that breaks down the traditional boundaries between author and reader, especially in regards to the construction of a text.¹⁰ Borges’s *ficciones*, according to Barth, “illustrate in a simple way the difference between *fact* of aesthetic

⁹ Alazraki subsequently collected these reviews and included them in *Critical Essays on Jorge Luis Borges* (1987).

¹⁰ I will return to the influence of Borges on Barth in the conclusion. See also Rostagno (117, 119), Payne (11–17), and Lowe and Fitz (164–66) for more information regarding Borges’s influence on Barth.

ultimacies and their artistic *use*” (68). Borges blends the styles of essay, academic criticism, myth, prose, and poetry, breaking the concept of the traditional short story by including epigraphs, prologues, prefaces, epilogues, footnotes, and authorial commentary. Barth specifically sees “*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*”—written in the style of a critical essay that cites fabricated sources—as the epitome of genre bending, an approach that erases long-held traditional boundaries between fiction and nonfiction (70–71). The *ficciones* are intertextual, self-reflexive, self-effacing, sardonic, humorous, and ironic. Barth also highlights Borges’s masterful use of the techniques of *mise en abyme*, style *indirect libre*, point of view, and interior dialogue (*Friday* 73). But these are not mere gimmicks or strategies, as Barth reminisced in a 1991 mini-memoir of his interactions with the master storyteller:

That is very high-tech tale-telling; the wonderful thing is that Borges can bring it off with such apparent ease and unassuming grace, his consummate virtuosity kept *up* his sleeve rather than worn on it; so much so that only after the initial charm of his best stories has led us to ponder and reread them [...]—only then are we likely to appreciate just how profoundly their imagination is wedded to their rendition. (*Further Fridays* 170)

Borges systematically and self-consciously draws attention to fiction as artifice, and by so doing, questions the aesthetic perceptions of reality and the imaginary that Barth found so inspiring. He argues that Borges’s *ficciones* are “not only footnotes to imaginary texts, but postscripts to the real corpus of literature” (74). Regarding “*Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*” Barth states:

[Borges] writes a remarkable and original work of literature, the implicit theme of which is the difficulty, perhaps the unnecessary, of writing original works of literature. His artistic victory, if you like, is that he confronts an intellectual dead-end and employs it against itself to accomplish a new human work. (*Friday* 69–70)

Payne argues that Barth appropriates “Pierre Menard,” first published in 1939, as “an ahistorized, ‘fresh’ solution to the increasingly thorny and frustrating problem of originality” (16). Even though Borges earned respect from well-known writers and critics in the United States, few mentioned the fact that they were reading him in translation, and nobody, initially, commented on the quality of these translations. Regardless, Borges enjoyed enormous critical success in the United States. He was finally recognized as a writer of major stature in the canon of Western literature and even twenty years after his death his popularity shows no signs of waning.¹¹ Much of this success was based on the early, and generally good, translations of his work. Nonetheless, with the help of Norman Thomas di Giovanni, both as translating partner and literary agent, Borges experienced even greater success at the beginning of the 1970s.

Norman Thomas di Giovanni

In November 1967, Norman Thomas di Giovanni first met the Argentine author while Borges was in residence at Harvard delivering the

¹¹ See also Stabb (*Jorge Luis Borges* 143–47) and Lindstrom (81–89) for further discussion on the international critical reception of Borges.

Charles Eliot Norton lectures on poetry. Di Giovanni, having recently completed an English anthology of the Spanish poet Jorge Guillén, wrote Borges to see if he would be interested in pursuing a similar project. Borges, intrigued by the prospect, responded and accepted to meet with the young and charismatic translator. Thus began a close and prolific partnership¹² that, over the course of four years, yielded half a dozen volumes in English, including an autobiographical essay and extensive notes on several *ficciones* for the English-reading audience.¹³ Due to the fact that Borges's "international reputation was soaring to unimagined heights," di Giovanni successfully secured several lucrative publishing contracts with *The New Yorker* and E. P. Dutton, in addition to arranging numerous lectures and readings throughout the United States

¹² Many have written about this unique and controversial collaboration, including di Giovanni himself. My study focuses principally on their translation methodology and the texts they produced and not on the extraliterary aspects of their personal relationship, although a few details must be mentioned to provide context. For a more detailed account, see the following: "At Work with Borges," di Giovanni (1970); *Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography* (pgs. 457–62), Rodríguez Monegal (1978); *With Borges on an Ordinary Evening in Buenos Aires* (pgs. 121–26), Barnstone (1993); "Stranger Than *Ficción*: The Unlikely Case of Jorge Luis Borges and the Translator Who Helped Bring His Work to America," Matthew Howard (1997); *The Lesson of the Master: On Borges and His Work*, di Giovanni (2003); *Borges: A Life* (pgs. 378–89), Williamson (2004); "Biography of Jorge Luis Borges" (pgs. 39–41), Sickels in *Bloom's BioCritiques: Jorge Luis Borges* (2004); and "Past Lives of Knives: On Borges, Translation, and Sticking Old Texts" (2004).

¹³ Borges and di Giovanni worked as co-translators on the following: *The Book of Imaginary Beings* (1969), *The Aleph and Other Stories* (1970), *A Universal History of Infamy* (1972), *Doctor Brodie's Report* (1972), and *In Praise of Darkness* (1974). A volume of lectures, *Borges on Writing* (1973), and the aforementioned poetry anthology, *Selected Poems: 1923–1967* (1972), also appeared during this time. Di Giovanni translated three volumes on his own, after they ended their collaboration: *Chronicles of Bustos Domecq* (1976), *The Book of Sand* (1977), *Six Problems for Don Isidro Parodi* (1981). In conjunction with his translating duties, di Giovanni began "a subtle campaign of egging [Borges] on" to publish new poems and stories (Williamson 385).

(Williamson 392).¹⁴ Dutton was interested in creating an official canon in English, publishing all of Borges's former and future output, but attaining the rights to stories previously published in English proved nearly impossible.¹⁵ Due to this setback, and to the fact that Borges was reluctant to translate any of his earlier work, which he considered of inferior quality, "it was agreed to put together an anthology of stories and prose pieces, which would be published in due course under the title *The Aleph and Other Stories*" (Williamson 380–81).

What sets *The Aleph* apart from other English collections is the fact that Borges himself participated extensively in the translation process, often reshaping and rewriting the texts. Di Giovanni moved to Buenos Aires to work in daily sessions with Borges, a process that "lent di Giovanni's translations a luster of authority." Nevertheless, his "efforts have left a troubling legacy for Borges's readers and critics." Critics, especially scholars intimately familiar with the Spanish originals, accused di Giovanni of tidying up and simplifying "Borges's highly allusive work" (Howard 42). According to Rodríguez Monegal, di Giovanni "was unhappy with the stiffness and inaccuracies of the existing English

¹⁴ Regarding the reception Borges in the United States, Williamson writes: "At the end of March 1971 Borges set off [...] to the United States. His literary reputation was at its peak, and the visit became a round of award ceremonies, talks, and readings in halls packed to overflowing with enthusiastic audiences. He went to Brigham Young University in Utah; he was made an honorary member of the Institute of Arts and Letters; he presided at a recital of his poems at the Poetry Center at the YM-YWHA in New York; Columbia University awarded him with an honorary doctorate, and held a colloquium on his work; Yale organized 'An Evening with Borges,' which attracted such a large audience that the venue had to be changed at the last minute" (394).

¹⁵ In the preface to *The Aleph and Other Stories*, Borges and di Giovanni bemoan the fact that certain titles were unavailable to translate, due to copyright restrictions.

versions of Borges” so he determined that their versions would read with greater clarity and simplicity (*Literary Biography* 459). In Howard’s opinion, di Giovanni’s translations proceeded from one underlying principle: “to make Borges’s writing clearer and less ambiguous for North American readers,” and specifically for readers who were not professors (43, 44). This is especially notable, as we shall see shortly, when one compares the di Giovanni translations with those found in *Ficciones* or *Labyrinths*. In his defense, di Giovanni states the following in regards to their versions of previously published pieces:

On a number of occasions, Borges and I were able to make and publish new translations of some of his finest tales—ones translated into English even three or more times previously. I have likened our achievement in these stories to the cleaning of old pictures. In our effort, we tried hard to restore the clarity, the sharpness, and the color of the originals. (*Lessons* 178–79)¹⁶

Admittedly, there are a few nitpicky professors that attack di Giovanni’s work, but many of their critiques are not only valid, but warranted. These questions deserve a response and explication because of the level of rewriting that occurs in the Borges and di Giovanni translations.

In the preface of *The Aleph and Other Stories*, Borges and di Giovanni, as coauthors, include a brief, yet insightful note on their translation methodology. Borges had never before worked with his translators directly, and he and di Giovanni had to create a method for

¹⁶ Barnstone notes that Borges “had even gone back at times and retouched the Spanish as a result of the English translations” (*With Borges* 122).

approaching this translation project. Their introduction not only explains how and why they made certain changes, but it also reflects their definition of good prose writing.

Perhaps the chief justification of this book is the translation itself, which we have undertaken in what may be a new way. Working closely together in daily sessions, we have tried to make these stories read as though they had been written in English. We do not consider English and Spanish as compounded of sets of easily interchangeable synonyms; they are two quite different ways of looking at the world, each with a nature of its own. English, for example, is far more physical than Spanish. We have therefore shunned the dictionary as much as possible and done our best to rethink every sentence in English words. (9)

In a translation seminar at Columbia University, Borges clarifies that what they sought was “something like spoken English.” He continues: “Of course, that’s impossible, but what we attempt is an imitation of it. We are certainly trying to avoid written English, which is quite different” (*Borges on Writing* 110).¹⁷

The joint venture in creating *The Aleph and Other Stories* highlights yet another fascinating aspect of Borges’s writing, that is, his familiarity with English and the influence it had on the translation process. By virtue of participating as coauthor of the translation, as Rodríguez Monegal observes, “Borges has assumed the status of writer in English, a role he had so far avoided” (460). In spite of his vast knowledge of the

¹⁷ Despite his familiarity with British English, Borges was particularly fond of *American* English, which he mentioned in an interview with Ronald Christ: “My hope for English—for the English language—is America. Americans speak clearly. [...] America must save the language [...]” (45).

English language, in addition to his expertise in English and American literature, Borges was not “an English writer capable of writing with the freedom, inventiveness, and feeling for words that Borges, the Spanish writer, has” (*Literary Biography* 460–61). Moreover, as a co-translator of his own texts, “Borges seems old-fashioned, awkward. His Victorian, bookish handling of the English language does a disservice to the original’s truly creative Spanish” (461). Even di Giovanni notes the “slightly old-fashioned and British qualities” of Borges’s English, which no doubt carried over into the translations (“At Work” 293). The combination of Borges’s refined British English with di Giovanni’s contemporary American English was peculiar. Rodríguez Monegal notes:

The result, from a literary point of view, is sometimes strange. If their translations cannot be objected to from the point of view of accuracy and scholarship (they are the best one can ask for), they are less than unique from a purely creative point of view” (461)

Rodríguez Monegal suggests that their efforts resulted in a literary curio rather than the definitive English versions of Borges’s work they had hoped to create. Thomas E. Lyon also notes that Borges and di Giovanni offer “a creative, loose transliteration,” but one that “often lends a more pedestrian, commonplace touch to Borges’s prose than previous translations” (496). He also comments on the awkward, and slightly antiquated, English:

Indeed, many of the stories do read as though they had been written in English—Tom Sawyer English. And anyone who has talked with or read of Borges knows that Mark Twain, and nineteenth-century writers in general, are his favorites.

Here he echoes their English voices. The translation, which some may consider weak for the above reason, is most assuredly the way Borges perceives English. (496)

This last point reveals a great deal about Borges and the quality of these translations. In spite of di Giovanni's enthusiastic, and occasionally overbearing, influence on Borges, the translations found in *The Aleph* reflect the way Borges perceived English. Both author and translator realized that the translations they were producing "would define him for generations of readers" (Howard 47). Of course, the characters of these two men differed greatly, but they were assiduous in their collaborative efforts. Irrespective of the occasional infelicities or missteps in their partnership, *The Aleph and Other Stories* further propelled Borges into the limelight of inter-American studies and international literature.

Early Critical Responses (1970–71)

When *The Aleph and Other Stories* came out in the fall of 1970, it was reviewed widely, appearing in over a dozen prominent magazines, newspapers, journals, and reference guides.¹⁸ Due to the space limitations of book reviews, few offered more than an overview of the

¹⁸ Because my study focuses specifically on the reception of a single collection, *The Aleph and Other Stories: 1933–1969*, I will not discuss the reviews of the other volumes that appeared around the same time. In the interest of bibliographical completeness, however, here is a list of reviews for *Labyrinths*, *Ficciones*, and *Dreamtigers*: Mildred Adams, "Miniatures of a Giant," *New York Times* (27 May 1962); "Books: Greatest in Spanish," *Time* (22 Jun. 1962); Paul de Man, "A Modern Master," *New York Review of Books* (19 Nov. 1964); "Pick of the Paperbacks," *Saturday Review* (20 Mar. 1965); Alex Hamilton, "Gay Procession: A Survey of the Month," *Books and Bookmen* (Mar. 1965); Judith Merril, "Books," *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (Oct. 1965); John Updike, "The Author as Librarian," *New Yorker* (30 Oct. 1965); Colin Wilson, "Borges and Nostalgia," *Book Review* (Aug. 1973); "Fiction: The Decade's Most Notable Books," *Time*, (26 Dec. 1969).

contents, a brief summary of the more notable pieces, and perhaps a few encouraging words highlighting Borges's inimitable talent and growing prominence in literature. Several mention the "Autobiographical Essay" and the "Commentaries," noting that they were written specifically for an American audience. While some reviewers indicate that Borges collaborated with di Giovanni in these translations few actually assess their quality. All of the reviews, no matter their brevity, are positive and give Borges a place of prominence within a then-nascent inter-American literature.

The first two book reviews, *Kirkus* on 15 October 1970 and *Publisher's Weekly* on 19 November 1970, exemplify the majority of the book reviews. They both mention that *The Aleph* contains translations made in collaboration between di Giovanni and Borges and offer cursory remarks about some of the *ficciones* included, but there is no assessment of the quality thereof. A few weeks later, Edwin Warner's flattering review, "Books: The Dagger of Deliverance," appeared in *Time*, which had one of the largest circulations in the country at the time. Although he notes, "these tales [...] have been smoothly turned into English," he does not comment on their quality (n.pag). James Finn, in "Fantasist of the Intellect," which appeared at the beginning of December 1970 in *The New Republic*, compares Borges to Hawthorne, Kafka, Poe, and Chesterton and then quotes the French author François Mauriac's flattering words regarding Borges. Moreover, Finn is the first reviewer to make more than

a cursory remark about the translations: “One critic has said that his prose is ‘as transparent as rainwater’ and that he lost little if anything in translation. Yet there are differences, and they bend in favor of this translation” (32). In order to show the superiority of these translations, he includes the first sentence of “The Dead Man,” first in the original, then in an earlier translation, and then in this version. Due to space restrictions he is unable to offer a detailed comparative analysis, but he observes:

One sentence is admittedly not much to rest a case on, but additional quotations would, I believe, support the contention that this translation has an ease, a rapidity, an elegance that should make it *the* Borges in English. And Borges in English is, if not essential, a most valuable addition. (32)

Finn, therefore, contends that the collaborative efforts between di Giovanni and Borges have produced authoritative and “definitive versions” of Borges in English, a sentiment with which John W. Charles of Brown University Library concurs in his brief evaluation in *Library Journal*. Charles also remarks that *The Aleph* is an excellent introduction, “for nearly all [library] collections, especially those which have steered clear of Borges formerly” (98).

Geoffrey Hartman, in his enthusiastic and influential *New York Times* review, published on New Year’s Day, 1971, connects this translation to previous efforts by including a list of “Borges in English Today.” He contextualizes Borges’s recent success in English, noting the renown he enjoyed for years in his native Argentina, Latin America, and

Europe, but not Great Britain. Hartman comments on the overwhelming critical success of Borges in the United States:

Several books have now been devoted to him; his conversation is avidly taped and printed; he has served as visiting professor on several American campuses; and the claim is sometimes heard that he ranks with Joyce and Kafka. (5)

In spite of the otherwise informative and encouraging review of *The Aleph*, he does not examine the actual translations. This is also the case of the review that appears in *The Booklist* two weeks later. In contrast, María Rosa Delgado's review in *Best Sellers*, although brief, focuses on the quality of these renderings, noting that they will appeal to "scholarly American readers, [...] intellectuals, lovers of philosophy, and specialists of literature" (434, 435). She remarks:

These English versions are excellent. Because each narrative has retained in translation the striking thought and poetic prose of the Spanish original, it seems reasonable to say that the work, as a whole, does justice to the art of Borges despite the fact that some important stories are omitted. (434)

Robert Scholes, in *Saturday Review*, in the short space allotted, also laments the absence of several noteworthy *ficciones* noting that the copyright holders "have maintained their rights at the cost of depriving English literature of authoritative versions" (23). One of his most scathing remarks, however, is aimed towards the Nobel Prize committee for the politicized judging process: "If the Nobel Prize judges could forget their political juggling for a moment and really award a prize for "literature," they would be forced to acknowledge the unique achievement

of Jorge Luis Borges” (23). Even though Borges’s presence in the United States was less than a decade old, critics were already recognizing that his meritorious contribution to literature deserved the Nobel Prize.

V. S. Pritchett’s prestigious *New York Times Book Review*, “Don Borges,” appeared at the end of January 1971. Pritchett first calls Borges “a gift to the professors” since he avoids “self-dramatizations,” the “Zeitgeist,” and “contemporary ‘problems’” (n.pag.) He makes the usual comparisons of Borges to Kafka, Poe, Baudelaire, Cervantes, but also to Calderon’s *La vida es sueño* and even to Mérimée. After discussing Borges’s upbringing by an English grandmother, an Anglophile father, and his preference for English literature to French and Spanish, Pritchett makes an important observation regarding the inter-American appeal of Borges:

Back in Buenos Aires where he could hardly leave the house, [...], Borges looked like a Europeanized cosmopolitan. And fifty years ago the cosmopolitan was at its high moment. For all this, Borges is not an intellectual expatriate. He is not deeply Europeanized. Two qualities make him thoroughly of the American continent: loneliness and the idea of the quest. These have hardened the soft outline of what is called the European sadness. (n.pag.)

Pritchett sees a deep-seated American aspect to his work in spite of the European, and specifically English, influence on Borges. He only briefly touches on this point, one that Rodríguez Monegal fleshes out several years later in his literary biography of the master:

But in spite of [his experience with English], he is a Spanish writer, and very specifically a Spanish American writer, of the River Plate area. He may sound exotic to Spanish readers

used to the stiff syntax and vocabulary of Spanish provinces or to the solemn horrors promoted by academies and universities all over the Hispanic world. But to readers of the best prose written in Latin America in the last century [...] Borges's writing seems, and is, very Spanish American. (459)

Irrespective of his extensive connections to European, specifically Anglo-Saxon, literary traditions, Borges is very much a Spanish American writer. Scholars studied this aspect in greater depth in the 1970s and 1980s, especially in regards to Borges as a precursor of the Boom, but Pritchett, a British critic, noticed Borges's Americanness early on.

Ronald Christ, in "Borges Translated," published in *The Nation* in March 1971, discusses the enormous critical success Borges had enjoyed in the previous years in the United States. He quips, "Borges's books are at last catching up to his fame and, better yet, Borges is catching up with his books" (282). Here, he refers to Dutton's decision to create a Borges canon in English. Christ remarks: "[T]hese books will inevitably have a settling and solidifying effect on the prestige of Borges among English-speaking readers: these books will give weight and substance to the echo of his genius" (282). Although Borges had already been presented in English by "trustworthy translators, like James Irby," and "thoroughly inappropriate ones, like Anthony Kerrigan," Christ sees the di Giovanni and Borges partnership as "one of the most extraordinary literary collaborations of our time." These translations come with "an authority and a grace" not previously found in other versions (282). Christ sees *The Aleph* as the product of three minds: "the Borges who wrote the Spanish

text in the past, the Borges, fully conversant with English, [...] and the di Giovanni, nominal translator” (283). Christ gives these translations his stamp of approval, commenting on their readability in English:

[T]his translation is definitive, superseding all others, which in the future can only exist as more or less perceptive commentaries on it. The simple ease, the quiet truth of this prose as it embodies intuitions and perceptions both subtle and inevitable will win new readers to Borges immediately and recall old ones. [...]he present version is far better English and much more suitable to the deceptively unassuming, patiently lucid, untiringly calm and gentle tone which *is* Borges [...].” (283).

Although, according to Christ, these versions embody the spirit and tone of Borges, he foresees the pending academic reaction to the di Giovanni and Borges translations:

Naturally the question of this version’s faithfulness to the original, to Borges’s own original, will occupy scholars and students for some time—dissertations on the subject are as good as written—but the superior English of this translation will serve its highest end in pleasing readers. (283)

In the end, Christ sees the pleasure of the text as more important as the perceived fidelity to the original Spanish *ficciones*.

Book reviews tapered off in the spring of 1971 with only a brief mention in the *Hudson Review*. Marvin Mudrick includes *The Aleph* along with several other recently published works in “Scrupulous Permutations and Occult Resemblances.” He quotes several passages, highlighting the unique prose style. Mudrick mentions the strong reputation Borges has garnered among American readers “on the basis of the small and uneven *oeuvre* up till now available in English” (200). Other than that oblique

reference, however, there is no further discussion of the translations. In June, and then again in December, *The New York Times Book Review* includes *The Aleph* on a list of that year's best sellers. One of the more in-depth reviews, previously mentioned, appeared that summer in *Books Abroad*. Lyon, a professor of Spanish at the University of Wisconsin, was the only reviewer that actually compared specific phrases found within the various translations:

A case for comparison might be the Yates and Irby, more lyric, translation of "The Circular Ruins." In places Borges/di Giovanni clarify to good effect: Yates/Irby's "vehement creature" becomes "violent creature" in the former; "inextricable jungle" becomes "impenetrable forest and swamp" in Borges/di Giovanni. In other instances, however, the result may not be entirely fortunate. Yates/Irby's excellent and evocative "viscous wasteland" is simply "sticky wasteland" in the new translation. "Corroded the metal nights" in the former is rendered "turned the metal of night to rust," in Borges/di Giovanni. In general, sentences are shorter, more orderly, and explicative than the more exotic Spanish original. (496)

Unfortunately, again due to space constrictions, Lyon is unable to fully explore the implications these modifications have on the reader's reception interpretation of the *ficciones*. Nonetheless, he brings to the foreground of the critical discussion the fact that different translators produce different translations, which also implies that reception and influence will consequently be affected.

In November, Ila Goody's review appeared in *Canadian Forum*, which gives us insight to the way Canadian critics were receiving Borges. She reviews *The Aleph* along with *Dreamtigers* and *The Book of Imaginary*

Beings. She situates Borges alongside Pynchon, Durrell, and Nabokov in that they all write about “quests, conundrums, and confessions,” yet she sets Borges apart in his singular ability to craft the “metaphysical mystery story” (34). Pointing out that Borges has already appeared in numerous translations, she calls the re-translations of *The Aleph* “aesthetically equal and often superior to their predecessors, manifesting both increased elegance of diction, and, at the same time, greater conversational expansiveness” (35). Goody describes Borges’s style as the “interpenetration of diction, image, rhythm, and idea,” as well as, “verbal economy and concentration of effect with fluid prose rhythms” (34). She deems the Borges / di Giovanni collaboration a success in transmitting his style from Spanish to English, rendering highly readable translations.

The final review of *The Aleph* appeared a year after its publication, on 30 December 1971, in *Listener*. David Gallagher, in “Paper Tigers” reiterates much of what had already been said in previous reviews. He discusses the copyright complications that prevented the inclusion of some of Borges’s better-known works:

[M]any of Borges’s best stories [...] are not included, owing to previous translators’ reluctance to yield their rights. This is a pity, because di Giovanni’s new translations are far better than those of his forerunners. Also, the reading of Borges is a cumulative enterprise, and without a previous knowledge of key stories like “Funes the Memorioso” much of the richness of apparently less meaningful pieces is lost” (912)

Gallagher, quoting the preface, discusses the translators’ objective in making “the stories read as though they had been written in English”

(912). For the most, he finds they succeed, “unlike any Borges translations hitherto” (912). He quickly points out, however, that certain infelicities crop up here and there in the texts: “Very occasionally some of Borges’s more engagingly eccentric turns of phrase have been pared down” (912). Gallagher is one of the first reviewers, academic or otherwise, to point out the fact that the modifications, simplifications, and clarifications found in the English versions of twenty-year-old pieces are due to Borges’s “own current—and perhaps justified—distaste for the more spectacular adjectives [in which] he once indulged” (912). Borges states in the preface to *Doctor Brodie’s Report* his desire to write in a direct manner: “I have done my best—I don’t know with what success—to write straightforward stories” (9).¹⁹ Andrew Hurley observes:

More than once [Borges] draws our attention to the “plain style” of the pieces, in contrast to his earlier “baroque.” And he is right: Borges’s prose style is characterized by a determined economy of resources in which every word is weighted, every word (every mark of punctuation) “tells.” Is a quiet style, whose effects are achieved not with bombast or pomp, but rather with a single exploding word or phrase, dropped almost as though offhandedly into a quiet sentence. (“A Note on the Translation,” *Collected Fictions* 518).

Moreover, stylistic simplicity does not signify intellectual simplicity, as Borges affirms: “I do not dare state that they are simple; there isn’t anywhere on earth a single page or single word that is, since each thing

¹⁹ Rodríguez Monegal, Williamson, di Giovanni, and Lyon indicate Borges’s blindness and his need to dictate his writing as a factor that led to the development of a more straightforward narrative style.

implies the universe, whose most obvious trait is complexity” (*Doctor Brodie’s Report* 9).

Although not a book review, Carter Wheelock’s “Borges’s New Prose” was probably the first critical assessment of the Borges and di Giovanni collaboration, which appeared in the 1972 collection of essays, *Prose for Borges*.²⁰ Like Gallagher he discusses the effect Borges’s truncated style of the late 1960s had on the translation process.

Borges’s new inclination toward the simple and straightforward has been carried into English, not only in the translations of his new fiction but also in the recasting of stories written years ago. This is undoubtedly better than trying to produce in English the complicated linguistic effects of the Spanish originals. (389)

Of course specific features will always be lost when transferring the original to another linguistic system, but Borges’s unique blend of multilingual sensibilities and an English syntactical approach to his Spanish prose only further complicates the process. Wheelock notes: “the special effect produced by writing in Spanish while thinking in English, using English word order, cannot be duplicated in English even by reversing the process” (389).²¹ The other notable characteristic unique to Borges’s Spanish was his use of “involutions and nuances heavily dependent on a particular vocabulary, often shockingly ill-fitting, ambiguous, or otherwise strange” (Kristal, *Invisible Work* 130–31).

²⁰ Bloom later included this same essay in his 1986 volume dedicated to Borges.

²¹ Borges and di Giovanni also discuss the heavy English influence on his syntax (*Borges on Writing* 135–37).

Transferring into English the effect of many of these jarring lexical combinations proved difficult, if not impossible. Since Borges is just one of many readers of his *ficciones* “any clarification of strange language [constitutes] in some degree a re-creation or an interpretation” (390–91). This, coupled with Borges’s conversion to a more stripped down narrative style, greatly influenced the English versions that appeared in *The Aleph*. Moreover, Wheelock reminds us that Borges is translating some stories nearly twenty years after they were originally published. This temporal displacement affects the process of translation with all that it implies: “slips of memory, changes in theory, the urge to improve the story, the influence of intervening criticism and the public’s reaction, and the hand of a recent co-translator” (390).²² Here, Wheelock calls attention to a key factor in the process of reception and influence, especially in regards to translation: the readership. The original Spanish-language readers of Borges formed “a limited, somewhat erudite, and very Argentine readership, at a time when he was little known or appreciated” (391). The English-reading audience of *The Aleph*, however, was “much larger and less intellectual [and] largely ignorant of the context and tradition of Argentine literature” (391). For this reason, Borges and di Giovanni decided to supply “the American reader with those things—geographical,

²² In the foreword to *Doctor Brodie’s Report*, Borges and di Giovanni note the advantage to translating a work shortly after its composition: “One difference between this volume and the last lies in the fact that the writing and translation were, except in one case, more or less simultaneous. In this way our work was easier for us, since, as we were always under the spell of the original, we stood in no need of trying to recapture past moods. This seems to us to be the best possible condition under which to practice the craft of translation” (7).

topographical, and historical—taken for granted by any Argentine” (*The Aleph* 10). Their conscientious awareness of their readership, and the resulting alterations found in the translations, consequently affect the readability of the texts. Wheelock remarks:

The author-made translations now being published are most readable. They are smoother, in general, than the Spanish version; this diminishes the cerebral, deliberate quality conveyed by the more abrupt Spanish narrations, in which the uneven stops and starts give each word and phrase an intentionality and a singular authority. (392)

Again, we see that the stylistic changes present in the translations are a result of Borges and di Giovanni’s awareness of their American readership. The English versions, therefore, elicit a much different reception between native English and Spanish readers. Wheelock also notes the grammatical shifts in the translations: “Conjunctions now smooth the path and relax the reader where semicolons used to jar him; transitions are made where there were only juxtaposed ideas” (392). While Wheelock attributes “such changes in the fluidity of language and idea” to di Giovanni’s “sense of clarity and polish,” he reminds us that we must not forget Borges’s “abandonment, of what he calls in the preface to *Doctor Brodie’s Report*, ‘the surprises inherent in a baroque style’ (392, 11). Borges’s more sparse writing style, combined with di Giovanni’s own stylistic conceptions resulted in highly readable versions in English. Wheelock calls these translations “by far the best yet, particularly from the standpoint of their enjoyability to the average reader” (390). He,

nevertheless, does not fail to realize that “scholars will find them in some respects problematical” (390).

On the whole, these reviews represent a positive and encouraging reception of Borges by the literary community. Understandably, the reviewers that analyze the linguistic and cultural aspects to the translations in any significant detail were professors of Spanish familiar with the originals. What we learn is that even though di Giovanni and Borges rethink, reshape, and rewrite the *ficciones*, they offer a comparable reading experience in English. Certainly, Borges’s narrative style of the 1940s and 1950s has been smoothed out in these translations, but this was due to his own desire to simplify his writing, especially when recasting his *ficciones* in English. Overall, the translations found in *The Aleph and Other Stories: 1933–1969* offer a unique reading experience in English that differs somewhat, but not significantly, from the original Spanish. In spite of any deficiencies these translations may have had, this collaborative translation project enhanced and strengthened Borges’s reputation in the United States.

“Pedro Salvadores”

First published in *Elogio de la sombra* (1969), “Pedro Salvadores,” presents several translation challenges, specifically in regards to the

embedded cultural and historical references specific to Argentina.²³ Di Giovanni explains: “Our problem in the translation was how to make the narrative’s complex background in Argentine history wholly intelligible to the English-speaking reader” (*Lesson* 173).²⁴ Through subtle modifications, di Giovanni and Borges successfully insert enough explicative information for the reader to understand the nature of the references.

The opening sentence of the second paragraph introduces the characters: “Un hombre, una mujer y la vasta sombra de un dictador son los tres personajes” (*OC II* 372). The dictator is not named directly except obliquely at the end of the story “because every Argentine knows who that dictator was” (*Lesson* 174). By the end of the paragraph, the man and woman have been introduced, and here, di Giovanni and Borges felt that their American readers should be told who the dictator was (177). They simply include the short line, “The dictator, of course, was Rosas.”

In the second sentence of the same paragraph “la batalla de Caseros” is mentioned. “Again, Borges takes his reader’s knowledge for granted,” di Giovanni writes, “just as no American writer would have to spell out the significance of Yorktown or Appotomax, or an English writer Hastings or Waterloo” (*Lesson* 174). He continues: “I asked Borges what

²³ All references to “Pedro Salvadores” are found in *Obras completas* (II: 372–73) and *The Aleph and Other Stories* (187–89).

²⁴ Di Giovanni’s discussion of “Pedro Salvadores” in *The Lesson of the Master* is a revised and expanded version of what he first wrote in “At Work with Borges” in 1971.

the significance of the battle of Caseros was. 'It was Rosa's downfall,' Borges told me. I suggested we say that, and he agreed" (174). The line, "mi abuelo Acevedo lo vio, días o semanas después de la batalla de Caseros" became "my grandfather Acevedo saw him days or weeks after the dictator's downfall in the battle of Caseros." With a very slight addition, without interrupting the flow of the narrative, the reader now understands the historical importance of the battle.

The next sentence indicates the political affiliation of Pedro Salvadores: "y era unitario." Di Giovanni explains how they worked around this problem:

Borges felt that this piece of Argentine history would be lost on the English-speaking reader and should therefore be left out. It seemed to me, however, that if he supplied me with the background we could make the reference meaningful in the translation. I also felt that it was essential to the story that the two opposing sides be firmly established, and what better place than here. [...] I asked Borges whether this meant that Salvadores was opposed to the tyranny. The answer was yes. (175)

Borges also humorously suggested they make it obvious so that his readers did not think of Emerson and New England when they saw the word "Unitarian" (175). The original phrase, "Poseería (nos cabe suponer) un establecimiento de campo y era unitario," now read "He owned (let us suppose) a ranch in the country and, opposed to the tyranny, was on the Unitarian side." With the addition of a few words, the translation provides a basic context without entering a lengthy explanation of the differences between "los unitarios" y "los federales."

The next cultural reference occurs in the description of where the man and woman lived: “los dos vivían en la calle Suipacha, no lejos de la esquina del Temple.” Borges “quickly explained that Temple did not exist any longer but was the old name for Viamonte” (176). Di Giovanni continues:

But since these streets will mean nothing to the reader, you can leave them out if you want to,” he said. “Or instead, you might simply say, ‘the heart of Buenos Aires.’” [...] I liked his idea and thought we should use it as well; also, remembering what he had told me about the topography of old Buenos Aires—how, for example, the present Barrio Norte was once the edge of town—it occurred to me that if we worked in the one word “now” we could hint at the spread of the city during the past century. (176)

They rendered the phrase as such: “they lived together on Suipacha Street near the corner of Temple in what is now the heart of Buenos Aires.” This clarification does not alter the overall message or tone of the story, but it reveals that the setting is in Buenos Aires, which helps the reader have a deeper connection with the city, even if he or she does not know the area.

What follows is a description of the couple’s home, a typical Buenos Aires house of the day: “la puerta de calle, el zaguán, la puerta cancel, las habitaciones, la hondura de los patios.” For somebody not familiar with this style of urban dwelling, the description may not make much sense. The images “a street door,” “a long arched entranceway,” and “inner grillwork gate,” the reader begins to form a mental image. The

phrase, “la hondura de los patios,” however, caused di Giovanni to pause and search for an appropriate corollary in English. He explains:

The old houses of Buenos Aires are narrow and extraordinarily deep, having a succession of patios, strung out one behind the other. The first of these might have a black-and-white chessboard paving; the third, usually unpaved, a grapevine. (176)

They decided to convey this image as “a row of two or three patios.” Years later, however, di Giovanni wondered whether “a depth of patios” would not have been better (176). I think that in this instance, di Giovanni’s desire to concretize and explain this small aspect of River Platte architecture resulted in the loss of a beautiful, yet simple, poetic image.

After the introduction of the characters and the description of the setting, the narrator introduces the conflict: “Una noche, hacia 1842, oyeron el creciente y sordo rumor de los cascos de los caballos en la calle de tierra y los vivas y mueras de los jinetes.” In the next line comes a reference to “la mazorca,” which they felt they needed to explain. Di Giovanni describes their solution:

After Borges had described them to me, it seemed that they were the storm troopers of that era. The most straightforward solution we could think of was to say, “This time Rosas’s henchmen did not ride on.” Three sentences later, the word is used again, but having just been explained, we felt that in this instance we could get away without translating or otherwise explaining it. (177)

The resulting translation is as follows:

One night, around 1842, Salvadores and his wife heard the growing, muffled sound of horses’ hooves out on the unpaved street and riders shouting their drunken *vivas* and their threats. This time Rosas’s henchmen did not ride on.

[...] The *mazorca* broke into the house; they had come to take Salvadores.

By maintaining the second “mazorca,” and even the “vivas,” in their original Spanish, the reader is reminded that the story takes place in another country and another culture. Whereas the Argentine reader will experience a slight cultural variation, due to the numerous historical references, but those that read it in English will most likely experience even more of a cultural distancing. This temporal and historical displacement, nevertheless, is inevitable, but di Giovanni and Borges successfully contextualize the story in such a way that the American reader can enjoy the story without completely missing out on all the subtle cultural references.

Di Giovanni happened upon the final reference quite by accident. When he first read “rompieron toda la vajilla celeste” he wondered what Borges initially wanted to convey: “Did he mean that they smashed *all* Salvadores’s china, which happened to be blue, or was it that among all the crockery they smashed only the blue pieces?” (178). Borges explained that it was the latter since blue was the Unitarian color (178). Di Giovanni continues: “And when the Argentine reader sees “vajilla celeste,” [...] does he understand at once what you are talking about? Yes, Borges said, everyone knew” (178). Since that was the case, they determined that the reader in English needed to understand that aspect as well, and the best way to do so “was to introduce the information as a parenthesis enclosed by brackets. It was a usage Borges often employed”

(178). In the end, the sentence came out like this: “they smashed all the blue chinaware (blue was the Unitarian color).” Again, through a slight addition, the translators hearken back to the political divisions that exist between these two groups of people. The reader need not understand the political complexities but this parenthetical insertion, which fits nicely within Borges’s own style, offers an important detail that otherwise would have been lost.

In my estimation, di Giovanni and Borges, by working closely together, effectively recast a very Argentine story in such a way that an English-speaking reader can comprehend. Certainly an Argentine reader’s background knowledge will provide deeper insight, but the translators successfully retain much of the cultural, historical, and topographical richness. In the case of “Pedro Salvadores,” as well as others, di Giovanni and Borges provide a comparable reading experience even with many culturally specific references. The reworked version of “Pedro Salvadores” in English is just one example of successful cultural translation.

“Las ruinas circulares”

First published in *Sur* in December 1940, “Las ruinas circulares” is one of the most anthologized and, consequently, most translated of

Borges's *ficciones*. A recasting of the legend of the golem,²⁵ Borges "plays with the blurred limits between reality and dream" in this tale "of a man created by another, and the horror of his final discovery that we are all inhabitants of dreams dreamed by somebody else" (Rodríguez Monegal, *Literary Biography* 407, *Borges: A Reader* 348).²⁶ Borges challenges the reader's perception of reality with this "vertiginous notion that the world may be a dream" (Scholes 134). The themes of the double and simulacrum, furthermore, are ones to which Borges returns time and again throughout his *oeuvre*.²⁷ We must not forget, however, that the astonishing quality of Borges's *ficciones* results from a combination of perplexing concepts and effective prose. Referencing the opening lines, Stabb comments: "The language, rhythmic and at times extremely poetic, creates a mood and texture that compliments [sic] the theme of the piece with remarkable fidelity" (*Jorge Luis Borges* 122). "Las ruinas circulares" embodies the inextricable relationship between form and content, a reality that presents significant challenges to translators. In this section,

²⁵ Rodríguez Monegal attributes this influence to *The Golem* (1915), by the Viennese writer Gustav Meyrink, which "is loosely based on a cabbalistic legend about a Prague rabbi who creates a creature out of mud and makes him his servant" (*Literary Biography* 136). See also Lindstrom, *A Study of the Short Fiction* (44), and Alazraki's "El Golem" and "Borges's Modernism and the New Critical Idiom" (83).

²⁶ For further discussion see the following: Martin Stabb's *Jorge Luis Borges* (122–25); Carter Wheelocks *The Mythmaker* (48–53); Naomi Lindstrom's *Jorge Luis Borges: A Study of the Short Fiction* (42–44); Jaime Alazraki's "Kabbalistic Traits in Borges's Narration" (81–82); and Robert Scholes's "The Reality of Borges" (134).

²⁷ In "Symbols in Borges's Work," Rodríguez Monegal states: "By means of his own fiction or those of others, Borges has often sought to define that abysmal experience of feeling oneself unreal: the dream or creation of another, a mere image, a simulacrum" (137).

we will analyze several renderings of the opening sequence, focusing specifically on the di Giovanni and Borges collaboration.

Before my close reading, however, I will briefly discuss the origin of “Las ruinas circulares” since the acts of reading, rewriting, and translation are underlying forces in both the creation and the message of this particular *ficción*. Much like the magician recasts himself in his son, Borges recasts Giovanni Papini’s “L’ultima visita del gentiluomo malato” in “Las ruinas circulares.”²⁸ Borges, in his translation, edits the original substantially. According to Kristal, Borges “erases all the supernatural elements of the original with the exception of the main conceit of the story.” He also “eliminates aspects of the original that would otherwise qualify it as a gruesome tale of horror by cutting details of the crimes of the gentleman” (Kristal 119). In addition to these excisions and redactions in the translation, Borges appropriates elements of Papini’s story into “Las ruinas circulares,” as Kristal observes:

In the striking opening line of “The Circular Ruins” Borges compacts the beginning and end of Papini’s story, but he also alters the perspective of the story: in Papini’s tale the protagonist knows he is someone else’s dream, feels humiliated by that knowledge, wonders about his creator, and longs to vanish. (118)

²⁸ The Spanish version, “La última visita del caballero enfermo,” first appeared in *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (1940), which was edited by Borges, Silvina Ocampo, and Adolfo Bioy Casares. Kristal argues that Borges himself translated this particular story since several years later, in 1976, he included a significantly altered version in *Libro de sueños* (117).

Borges's translation of "L'ultima visita del gentiluomo malato" opens with the mysterious arrival of the ill gentleman much like the appearance of the magician, as we shall soon see, in "Las ruinas circulares":

Nadie supo jamás el verdadero nombre de aquel a quien todos llamaban el Caballero Enfermo. [...] Nadie le preguntó nunca cuál era su enfermedad y por qué no se cuidaba. [...] Nadie supo nunca dónde estaba su casa, nadie le conoció padres o hermanos. Apareció un día en la ciudad y, después de algunos años, otro día, desapareció. (205)²⁹

Kristal argues that in "Las ruinas circulares" Borges "fuses Papini's tale about the intensity of a dreamer whose dreams can inhabit the world of those who are awake" with the image of "the golem, the notion of a human being who longs to usher another into existence" (121).³⁰ This specific case exemplifies Borges's notion that, in literature, one can always improve the writing. Whether it is in translation or creative writing, Borges would frequently edit, alter, adapt, and rewrite sections with the ultimate goal of producing the best possible version. Even in translating, "Borges would occasionally cut elements from an original [...] only to use them in one of his own fictions" (Kristal 122).

The opening line of "Las ruinas circulares" is, perhaps, one of the most famous of Borges's entire *oeuvre*. Hurley suggests it is "one of the most famous opening lines in Spanish literature" (518). It reads: "Nadie

²⁹ "Nessuno seppe mai il vero nome di colui che tutti chiamavano il Gentiluomo Malato. [...] Nessuno gli chiese mai qual fosse il suo male [...]. Nessuno seppe dove fosse la sua casa; nessuno gli conobbe padre o fratelli. Apparve un giorno nella città e dopo alcuni anni un altro giorno scomparve" (*Il tragico quotidiano* 83–84).

³⁰ Kristal also demonstrates how writing "Las ruinas circulares" influences Borges's second translation of "L'ultima visita del gentiluomo malato" (120–22).

lo vio desembarcar en la unánime noche, nadie vio la canoa de bambú sumiéndose en el fango sagrado” (OC I: 451). In Lindstrom’s opinion, this particular sentence “contains the single most extensively discussed lexical choice in Borges’s work” (42). The reason why this sentence is so famous is because of the jarring adjective placement and usage found in the phrase, “la unánime noche.” The night in which the magician arrives “is described by an adjective that, in ordinary speech, could never be used for this purpose: unanimous” (Lindstrom 42). This unusual placement startles, especially a native Spanish speaker, even before she begins to consider the interpretive implications formed by the odd juxtaposition of “unánime” with “noche.” Although this quality is not entirely lost in the English translation, we must first understand why this placement is so unsettling in Spanish before we attempt to unpack its meaning. Borges frequently adheres to English syntax by placing the majority of his adjectives before nouns, thus creating unanticipated and disquieting combinations. Alazraki has studied the expressive function of the adjective in Borges’s prose:

En la prosa de Borges los adjetivos atributivos o epítetos devienen vehículos expresivos de la concepción de mundo que rige sus narraciones, pues muestran de qué manera lo real—el sustantivo—ha sido absorbido por esa concepción. El adjetivo es, así, el resultado final—en el estrato del lenguaje—de un proceso de asimilación y modificación de la realidad que revela los centros de interés de su autor. (*La prosa narrativa* 206–07)³¹

³¹ See “Adjetivación” in *La prosa narrativa de Jorge Luis Borges* (206–38). Alazraki examines five classifications of the adjective: “El adjetivo-tic, el metonímico, la hipálage,

Borges's use and placement of adjectives, therefore, is not haphazard, but calculated. The author's intent is to evoke certain images and to elicit specific emotions through peculiar combinations of adjectives and nouns. Accordingly, the adjective illuminates the nature of the reality encapsulated in the noun due to its descriptive and expressive functions.

In the case of "la unánime noche," Borges desires that the reader pause and reflect upon this strange grammatical yet meaningful construction. The reader, therefore, must pay close attention. Alazraki comments on the deceptive simplicity of Borges's prose: "

The fantastic character of his stories induces us often to estimate some seemingly incoherent words and occurrences as whimsical displays of arbitrary fantasy, thus missing the true impact of those masterfully constructed whimsicalities. ("Kabbalistic Traits" 81)

If the reader is not careful, she will glide over the phrase, "la unánime noche," and not realize that the opening line actually foreshadows the climax of the last: "Con alivio, con humillación, con terror, comprendió que él también era una apariencia, que otro estaba soñándolo" (OC I: 455). The adjective "unánime," surprisingly, alludes to the conclusion of "Las ruinas circulares," as Alazraki continues to explain:

[T]he word is used for its etymological constituents (*unus animus*) rather than for its normative meaning in order subtly to anticipate what is literally disclosed in the last line

el oxímoron y los bivalentes no solamente intensifican el vigor expresivo de la prosa, otorgándole esas virtudes nuevas en la literatura hispanoamericana—precisión, rigor, claridad, necesidad—, además, estos procedimientos convierten en forma—en el plano del estilo—en vehículo del contenido. [...] adjetivos como 'infinito,' 'vasto,' 'remoto,' recorren sus ficciones como un sostenido tic-tac, fijando a todas las cosas una dimensión que las torna impenetrables" (237). See also Ana María Barrenechea's "Borges y el lenguaje."

of the story: the magician's condition of appearance dreamt by another. ("Kabbalistic Traits" 81–82)³²

With this understanding, the epigraph from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*—"And if he left off dreaming about you..."—begins to make more sense. According to Lindstrom, this phrase is "an allusion to the concept that human beings are figures in the dream of some superior entity" (42).³³ While Alazraki reminds us, "it is absurd to think that in Borges's writings every word is capable of becoming a symbol," ("Kabbalistic Traits" 80–81) but in the specific example of "la unánime noche" the etymology of this heterogeneous combination carries weight.³⁴ Borges also uses this phrase as a linchpin that connects the epigraph to the final sentence. The unsettling combination strikes the tone for the entirety of the *ficción*. In this odd phrase, "la unánime noche," Borges demonstrates his poetic dexterity in a clean and straightforward prose.

³² Several Borges scholars have made this textual and structural connection. Irby points this out in his introduction to *Labyrinths*: "In the opening sentence of 'The Circular Ruins,' 'unanimous' means quite literally 'of one mind' (*unus animus*) and thus foreshadows the magician's final discovery" (xix). Sayers Peden observes: "The Spanish word 'unánime' was chosen with Borgesian exactitude to foreshadow the last words of the fiction, [...] thereby linking the beginning to the end and completing the perfect circularity of 'The Circular Ruins' ('The Arduous Journey' 70). Kristal echoes the idea that "unánime," in this instance, "could be read as a contraction of 'una ánima,' a single soul or spirit" (116).

³³ Bell-Villada reminds us: "The quotation is from the scene in which Tweedledum and Tweedledee tell Alice about the Red King; they explain to her that the king is actually dreaming of her, and, were he to awake, Alice would simply vanish" (94).

³⁴ Of course not every word is symbolic, but Borges was a master of concision, as Fraser remarks: "Borges had a gift for packing tomes of philosophy into five pages of surgical prose" (72).

As we will now see, all the translators maintain the peculiarity of “la unánime noche,” translating it as “the unanimous night”—all, that is, except di Giovanni:³⁵

No one saw him disembark in the **unanimous night**, no one saw the bamboo canoe sink into the sacred mud, (Bonner)

No one saw him disembark in the **unanimous night**, no one saw the bamboo canoe sinking into the sacred mud, (Irby)

No one saw him disembark in the **unanimous night**. No one saw the bamboo canoe running aground on the sacred mud. (Kerrigan)

Nobody saw him come ashore in the **encompassing night**, nobody saw the bamboo craft run aground in the sacred mud, (di Giovanni)

There are few differences between the first three renderings. Bonner and Irby are nearly identical, only differing in “sink” and “sinking.” Kerrigan divides the sentence into two, which actually reinforces the anonymity of the event by placing greater emphasis on “no one saw.” He also extends the interpretation of “sumiéndose” to “running aground,” which adequately explains how the boat is sinking in the mud. Out of the four versions, the di Giovanni translation looks the least like the others. First, he opts for “nobody” instead of “no one,” which is perfectly reasonable. Sticking to his habit of eschewing Latinate words, he offers “come ashore” for “disembark.”³⁶ In this instance, I applaud this change since

³⁵ I include the bibliographical information here so as not to clutter the in-text citations: Borges, *Obras completas* I: 451–55; Bonner, *Ficciones* 57–63; Irby, *Labyrinths* 45–50; Kerrigan, *Personal Anthology* 68–74; di Giovanni, *The Aleph* 55–64.

³⁶ It appears that early versions of “Las ruinas circulares” included a variant in the opening line, which may explain the discrepancy between di Giovanni and the other

“disembark” suggests a lofty, refined tone in English that does not exist in “desembarcar,” a word used every day in Spanish. Di Giovanni’s rule of avoiding the first word in the bilingual dictionary disrupts the lexical flow with “bamboo craft.” Di Giovanni chooses a bland, generic word, “craft,” over the appropriate “canoe.”

In the eyes of some scholars, di Giovanni committed an atrocious blasphemy when he translated “la unánime noche” as “the encompassing night.” Perhaps it is this specific phrase he had in mind when he accused scholars of “dwelling on single words and overloading them with significance” (*Lessons* 55). Whether or not the academicians look beyond the mark in “la unánime noche,” di Giovanni effectively washes away one of the most celebrated images of Borges’s entire corpus. Wheelock remarks: “The change smacks of decoding poetry, and there is a loss of flavor; but it also points, without doubt, to what Borges now calls baroque trickery and indicates what in his opinion is not essential in his earlier work” (Wheelock 391). As we have discussed, the combination of adjective and noun, infused with the significance of “una ánima” lends to a highly poetic turn of phrase, one that is completely suppressed in di Giovanni’s translation. The loss of this one phrase also destabilizes, if only slightly, the structural connection between the epigraph, opening,

translations. From a 1956 edition of *Ficciones* we read: “Nadie lo vio *arribarse* en la noche unánime” (emphasis mine). Sayers Peden states: “The ‘arribarse’ (*ad ripa* [shore]; *ad ripam appellere* [to steer toward shore]) is more precise than the more common verb ‘llegar.’ ‘Arribarse’ is twice translated as ‘disembark,’ but more correctly in the third version as ‘came ashore’” (70). Borges, while working with di Giovanni on the English translation, must have remembered the meaning he wished to convey in the early Spanish versions.

and closing lines. Wheelock reminds us that we must attribute some of these stylistic changes to Borges's own evolving desire to simplify his writing. V. S. Naipaul, in his 1972 article "Comprehending Borges," quotes di Giovanni's response to the academic outcry:

You can imagine how much has been written about that "unanimous." I went to Borges with two translations, "surrounding" and "encompassing." And I said, "Borges, what did you really mean by the unanimous night? That doesn't mean anything. If the unanimous night, why not the tea-drinking night or the card-playing night?" And I was astonished by his answer. He said, "Di Giovanni, that's just one example of the irresponsible way I used to write." We used "encompassing" in the translation. But a lot of the professors didn't like losing their unanimous night....

Again, we see how Borges's preference for simple, straightforward prose of the early 1970s influenced the translation of a thirty-year-old *ficción*. Furthermore, Borges and di Giovanni discuss the issue of changing celebrated passages, specifically "la unánime noche," in a question and answer session at New York University on 8 April 1971, moderated by Alexander Coleman. Borges comments that he prefers to invent new forms and blaze new literary trails, rather than retread the well-worn paths of yesteryear. Di Giovanni immediately connects this statement to his and Borges's desire to improve upon the originals when translating. The transcript is as follows:

Coleman: Ronald Christ has written about the remarkable translation you gave "unánime noche,"³⁷ which has puzzled many a commentator, and now in English—

³⁷ Here Coleman most likely refers to Christ's review of *The Aleph and Other Stories*: "the much annotated 'unanimous night' from 'The Circular Ruins' is replaced by

Borges: Well, to tell you the truth, it has puzzled *me!* I wrote it down because I thought it had a fine sound, hadn't been used before. But I wonder what it really means, if it means anything.

Coleman: —in English it comes out “encompassing night”—

Borges: That's far better.

Coleman: —which is lovely.

Borges: Of course. I'm sorry I wrote “unánime.” But there is no word for “encompassing” in Spanish.

di Giovanni: A mere rough draft.

Borges: A mere rough draft, yes. I was doing my best in a Romance language, say. (*Prose for Borges* 400)³⁸

Fraser, in “Past Lives of Knives: On Borges, Translation, and Sticking Old Texts,” analyzes this interchange, calling it “flummoxing” as well as “intriguing.” Borges refers to the phrase, “la unánime noche” “as the flawed rough draft [...] of an inevitable, and far superior English language version” (69). Fraser explores this idea further:

For Coleman, the Spanish word is the source. But then comes Borges's apology, along with a sly reversal: if Spanish only had a word for “encompassing”, he would never have used “unánime.” In other words, for Borges the Spanish word is the *target*. Not only a target, di Giovanni kicks in, but a *mere draft*, one layer in the palimpsest. One stage in a textual genesis meant to culminate in a splendid English edition. In other words, springing from an English deep text and evolving toward an English surface text, is an “insignificant” Spanish *middle* text. (emphasis in the original, 69–70)

‘encompassing night,’ perhaps in keeping with the principle of Borges's later style which prohibits any word from erupting out of the context” (“Borges Translated” 283).

³⁸ Also available in *Jorge Luis Borges: Conversations* (1998) edited by Richard Burgin.

Fraser's description of the phrase "la unánime noche" as a middle text, along with Borges's own renunciation of the original, provokes considerable thought regarding the valorization of an original text vis-à-vis the translation. The rewriting of "la unánime noche" as "encompassing night" is a clear example of Borges's doctrine of translation on several levels. First, he and di Giovanni looked at the Spanish as a draft that could be improved in English. Second, this approach reinforces Borges's idea that the translation is not necessarily inferior to the original. In fact, many times the translation surpasses the original, as was the case when Borges read *Don Quixote*, which he first read in English. Later, he found that the Spanish "sounded like a bad translation" (*The Aleph* 209). Although "the unanimous night" is a beautiful, if enigmatic, phrase, Borges had no problem allowing it to be rewritten in English. What many scholars have deemed a translation "failure" turns out to be a perfectly acceptable technique in Borges's doctrine of translation.

We have discussed, in general terms, the ways in which the di Giovanni and Borges translations diverge from earlier versions. Now, through a close comparative reading, we will see specifically how di Giovanni and Borges rewrote their versions as if they had been originally written in mid-twentieth-century English. Although the lexical and syntactical adaptations may seem insignificant, the sum total of such changes shapes the overall style and tone of the piece. We will also see

that the early translators did not stray too far from Borges's syntax and lexicon, producing, at times, awkward phrases with a Latinate vocabulary. From the vantage point of style, the di Giovanni and Borges version of "The Circular Ruins" reads much more smoothly and clearly. To facilitate my analysis, I have divided the second sentence of the first paragraph into six sequences, which roughly follow the natural breaks.

1. Lo cierto es que el hombre gris
besó el fango, (Borges)

What is certain is that the gray man
kissed the mud, (Bonner)

The truth is that the obscure man
kissed the mud, (Irby)

The certain fact is that the anonymous gray man
kissed the mud, (Kerrigan)

The fact is that the gray man
pressed his lips to the mud, (di Giovanni)

The first phrase opens with a neuter definite article in an adjectival phrase, "lo cierto." In this case, Irby and di Giovanni come closest to translating it into the most readable English. Bonner's rendering, while accurate, is too formal and it detracts from the conversational tone of the original. Kerrigan offers an awkward literal translation by forcing the inclusion of "certain" along with "fact." For "el hombre gris," what should be a straightforward rendering, Irby offers "the obscure man," and for some reason Kerrigan feels compelled to add "anonymous" to his description. The fact is, we do not know why the man is gray. It could refer to the fact that he has arrived under the darkness of night or that

he is covered in mud, which makes sense in the context. Most likely, the man is not just covered in mud but *made* of mud, if the reader understands that Borges was inspired by the legend of the golem in writing this *ficción*. The origin of man from earth also lends itself to an adamic reading or an allusion to the *Popol Vuh*. Irby, therefore, reduces the reader's ability to make this connection. Di Giovanni decides to translate another straightforward word, "besó," with the more literary "pressed his lips," which adds a gentle somberness to the tone.

2. repechó la ribera sin apartar
(probablemente, sin sentir) (Borges)

climbed up the bank without pushing aside
(probably, without feeling) (Bonner)

came up the bank without pushing aside
(probably without feeling) (Irby)

scaled the bank without pushing aside
(probably without even feeling) (Kerrigan)

scrambled up the bank without parting
(perhaps without feeling) (di Giovanni)

The first line is of greatest interest since each translator adequately translates the parenthetical in the second line. The verb "repechar" is difficult to translate since it originates from the noun *repecho*, which is a short, but steep slope. The English translation should convey the idea that the nameless protagonist exerts some effort to climb up the steep riverbank. Irby's rendering strips away any suggestion that the task is difficult. Bonner provides an accurate, straightforward rendering, but

Kerrigan and di Giovanni offer more evocative translations. While “scale” certainly alludes to the steepness of the embankment, “scramble” conveys a level of urgency or purpose to the protagonist’s actions.

3. las cortaderas que le dilaceraban las carnes (Borges)
the blades which were lacerating his flesh, (Bonner)
the brambles which dilacerated his flesh, (Irby)
the sharp-edged sedges lacerating his flesh, (Kerrigan)
the brushy thorns that tore his flesh, (di Giovanni)

This line poses several challenges since “las cortaderas” is a plant endemic to the pampas and Patagonia regions of Argentina. The *Real Academia Española* defines “cortadera” as the following: “Planta ciperácea de hojas alternas, largas, angostas y aplanadas, cuyos bordes cortan como una navaja. Tiene flores rojizas y baya amarilla. Se cría en lugares pantanosos y se usa el tallo para tejer cuerdas y sombreros.” In fact, *cortaderia selloana* is known as “silver pampas grass” in English. Since the setting of “The Circular Ruins” is far removed from the pampas of Argentina, Borges most likely uses this word in the generic sense of a plant with sharp stalks found in marshes. By saying “the blades,” and not “the blades of the plant,” which can be inferred from the context, Bonner produces a striking and violent image. Irby tries to find an equivalent plant in “brambles.” Kerrigan, offers a clunky phrase that provides too much detail. Di Giovanni, unlike Irby and Kerrigan, does not attempt to offer an exact equivalent of “cortaderas.” Although “brushy

thorns” is not as specific as “cortaderas,” he follows the spirit and not the letter of the word. Di Giovanni also diverges in how he translates “dilacerar.” This is a good example of di Giovanni’s tendency to avoid Latinate cognates, preferring, instead, a straightforward and simple word. It is also noteworthy that Bonner and Kerrigan employ the gerund, which efficiently sustains the momentum of the whole sequence, something that Irby and di Giovanni do not do as well. Nevertheless, di Giovanni’s translation stands out in its stark simplicity.

4. y se arrastró, mareado y ensangrentado, (Borges)
and crawled, nauseated and bloodstained, (Bonner)
and dragged himself, nauseous and bloodstained, (Irby)
and dragged himself, bloody and sickened, (Kerrigan)
and dragged himself, faint and bleeding, (di Giovanni)

This sequence exemplifies the diverse lexical choices in the various translations. First, Bonner’s rendering for the reflexive verb “arrastrarse” is not nearly as dynamic as the other translations. Moreover, “mareado y ensangrentado,” not a particularly difficult phrase, surprisingly generates four distinct versions. Bonner and Irby read “mareado” in the same vein, even though “nauseated” is more grammatically correct. Kerrigan places more emphasis on the image of being “mareado” by placing “sickened” at the end of the line. But the rhythm of “bloody and sickened” works much better than the other way around. Bonner and Irby both opt for the reserved “bloodstained,” which does not carry the same emotional impact

or movement as “bloody” or “bleeding.” Kerrigan and di Giovanni’s translations are more vibrant than the other two.

5. hasta el recinto circular que corona
un tigre o caballo de piedra, (Borges)

up to the circular enclosure crowned with
a stone tiger or horse, (Bonner)

to the circular enclosure crowned by
a stone tiger or horse, (Irby)

up to the circular enclosure whose crown is
a stone colt or tiger, (Kerrigan)

to the circular opening watched over by
a stone tiger, or horse, (di Giovanni)

Each translates the second line similarly, even though Kerrigan feels the need to define the gender of “caballo” and di Giovanni adds a comma. The first line, however, produces startling differences. In the translations of Bonner and Kerrigan, the gray man continues his ascent from the riverbanks “up to” the circular ruins. This upward motion reinforces the concept of man’s creation and evolution from the mud to the rational being he becomes. Leaving out that one preposition, “up,” destabilizes this particular interpretation. The rest of the first line epitomizes the early translators’ inclination to hold close to the original and offer literal translations. Di Giovanni, in contrast, rewrites the line but his reads much smoother in English.

6. que tuvo alguna vez el color del fuego
y ahora el de la ceniza. (Borges)

which sometimes was the color of flame
and now was that of ashes. (Bonner)

which once was the color of fire
and now was that of ashes. (Irby)

formerly the color of fire
and now the color of ash. (Kerrigan)

which once was the color of fire
and is now the color of ash. (di Giovanni)

This sequence does not present any significant linguistic or cultural challenges as we have seen in others. Although, it is fascinating to see how each translator renders the phrase especially in regards to the syntax. In this instance, Kerrigan and di Giovanni offer the most readable versions in English. Repeating “color” in the second line strengthens the binary opposition of “fuego” and “ceniza,” which underlines the passage of time that has occurred in “el recinto circular.”

By analyzing a small section of “Las ruinas circulares” we have seen how each of the translators tackles difficult challenges in word choice and placement, which consequently affects the overall style and tone of the passage. Bonner, Irby, and Kerrigan lean towards renderings that are more literal. Di Giovanni, in collaboration with Borges, rewrites the sentences so that they read as if they had been written originally in English. Although there is some loss, especially when di Giovanni simplifies a term or complex turn of phrase, but his version provides a smooth and uncomplicated reading experience. His stylistic and interpretational changes coordinate nicely with Borges’s own thoughts on translation.

Rewriting the Spanish into English provided Borges the opportunity to revisit and revamp his *ficciones*. “The Circular Ruins” and all the translations of *The Aleph and Other Stories* reflect Borges’s more simplified and direct style of writing that he had developed and refined over the course of several decades. We must remember that these translations are not English copies of the 1940 *ficciones*. Rather, they are English versions, rewritten in the late 1960s. The English translation is not inferior to the original. In some cases, it may even surpass it since Borges has been able to improve certain aspects of his work. In fact, this is one of the underlying themes of “Las ruinas circulares.” Waisman, in his analysis on “Las versiones homéricas,” makes a comment applicable to the magician and his son, especially if we read “text” as “man”:

The simulacra overtake the original, the original loses its privileged place as a solid source at the center; what is left is translations of translations, without an identifiable original. Every text is a rereading of a previous text, constituted of a network of references, citations, and allusions, an infinite system of intertextualities without a single, stable core. (Waisman 52)

At the end of “Las ruinas circulares,” the magician realizes he, too, is a mere simulacrum, just like his son. What the story does not tell us is whether the magician’s creator is the original or a copy of a previous iteration. What we see are only two links in an infinite chain “without a single, stable core.”

Conclusion

Using translation as a critical tool has helped us understand the inner narrative workings of Borges's work, as seen in "Pedro Salvadores" and "Las ruinas circulares." By the time Dutton published *The Aleph and Other Stories*, Borges was already well established as an important literary figure in the United States. Nevertheless, his recent fame combined with the wide reach of his publisher further pushed Borges into the limelight. While di Giovanni and Borges simplified and clarified many tricky passages, they realized that their American readership was much different than the elite literary crowd of Buenos Aires who were the initial audience of Borges. Di Giovanni and Borges restructured and rewrote many of the *ficciones*, but they ultimately produced highly readable versions. When we analyze the translations of *The Aleph*, based on the author's own criteria, especially when we take into account Borges's own notions of translation, then we must conclude that the di Giovanni and Borges collaboration was a resounding success from both a literary and critical perspective. Therefore, *The Aleph and Other Stories* represents one end of the spectrum I wish to establish in my larger conversation of translation "failure."

CHAPTER II

MISREPRESENTING NERUDA IN *THE HEIGHTS OF MACCHU PICCHU*

Pablo Neruda is one of the most widely translated figures of Latin American literature, in any language, and continues to be a predominant literary figure in the United States.¹ When considering the nature of Nathaniel Tarn's *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*, as well as its reception and influence in the United States, we must first understand the context in which it was translated. Tarn, a British poet of Anglo-French origin, was one of many poets in the United States that translated various Spanish and Spanish American poets, a trend that reached its apex in the late 1960s. By translating Neruda, these US poet-translators sought to revitalize the English poetic tradition through their poetic efforts. The first section of this chapter discusses the nature of poetry and the unique challenges of verse translation. The second section offers a brief overview of the issues and controversies surrounding the role of translation in the reception of Pablo Neruda in the United States from the 1920s to the 1970s.² The final section, which is the heart of this

¹ "At present, more than 100 books of his poetry have been published in translation here, from slim volumes offering a broadsheet of a single poem to last year's 1,000-plus-page volume of some 600 poems" (Cohen, "Establishing" 28). Here, Cohen refers to *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*, edited by Ilan Stavens and published in 2003 by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

² Jonathan Cohen is the foremost scholar on the role of translation in the reception and influence of Pablo Neruda in the United States. I will draw from his three articles on the subject: "The Early History of Neruda in English (1925–1937)," published in 1982;

chapter, provides a close comparative analysis of selections of Tarn's translation and the original, triangulating it with the respective translations of John Felstiner and Jack Schmitt. On one hand, *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* presents formidable challenges because what we ultimately hear is the voice of Nathaniel Tarn and not that of Pablo Neruda. On the other hand, it is a breathtaking poem in its own right that reinforced Neruda's growing acclaim in the United States.

Verse Translation

When discussing the translation of poetry, one usually confronts the oft-quoted aphorism of Robert Frost: "Poetry is what gets lost in translation." Translators of poetry tend to malign this statement while the layperson, especially the one with little experience with poetry in translation, nods in agreement. Regardless of Frost's original intention, this statement presupposes intrinsic qualities of poetry that are unique and specific to the original language, qualities that somehow resist the transfer from one linguistic and cultural system to another. Although Edith Grossman calls Frost's adage a "mock definition," I do not think we can discount it outright (64). It serves as a point of departure for a broader discussion on the nature of poetry. What is poetry and why do some consider it to be untranslatable? Why is translating poetry so

"Neruda in English: The Controversy Over Translation Poetics," published in 1983; and "Neruda in English: Establishing His Residence in US Poetry," published in 2004. See also John Felstiner's "Neruda in Translation," published in 1972, and Esperanza Figueroa's "Pablo Neruda en inglés," published the following year in 1973.

difficult? What, then, constitutes a good translation and a good translator of poetry? A discussion of these questions will provide a foundation to our study of the overall reception and influence of Pablo Neruda in the United States, which, in turn, will provide the framework for my analysis of Nathaniel Tarn's *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* as a "failed" translation.

According to Grossman, "poetry is the most intense, most highly charged, most artful and complex form of language we have" (93). Steiner identifies the poem as "maximal speech" because, without "conventional transparency" and in "those energies of covertness and of invention," a poem concentrates meaning (244). Although much of poetry, especially classical poetry, consists of "elements of form such as rhythm, meter, rhyme, stanzaic structure, and line length" (Grossman 96), the essential spirit of poetry moves beyond formalistic, stylistic, and structural aspects. Felstiner observes:

The question of verse translation continues to exercise translators, critics, and sometimes poets, because it goes deeper than judgments of loss or gain. Sooner or later the translator asks, Where does the nature of poetry subsist? In ideas, imagery, diction, pattern, sound, or rhythm? In all those together, of course, but perhaps most in sound and rhythm, which are specific to their own language. (29)

What lies at the heart of a poem, in Felstiner's view, is its "blend of sounds and rhythms, of tones and overtones" (*Translating* 26). Poetic verse is aural by nature, composed of "pauses," "convolutions of meaning," "cadences," and "musicality" (Grossman 99). What resides in

the backbone of poetry, therefore, is musicality and rhythm, as Grossman notes: “The beat of a line, whether subtle or emphatic, is, to my ear, crucial to both the spirit and the letter of the entire poetic statement” (97). Sound, tone, and rhythm are, therefore, fundamental aspects of poetry, which present challenges to the translator due to the inherent differences between languages, as Grossman observes:

The textures of language, its musicality, its own specific tradition of forms and meters and imagery, the intrinsic modalities and characteristic linguistic structures that make it possible to express certain concepts, emotions, and responses in a specific manner but not in another—all of these inhere so profoundly in a poem that its translation into another language appears to be an act of rash bravado verging on the foolhardy. (Grossman 93–94)

Once the translator takes on the “foolhardy” challenge to translate verse, he or she must wrestle with these intrinsic complexities of poetry. The “confluence of sound, sense, and form in a poem,” according to Grossman, presents “an especially difficult problem” (95).

In spite of the accompanying difficulties, verse translation is possible. Yet we are left with the question, what constitutes a good translation? What characterizes a good translator? Grossman describes the desired outcome of translating poetry:

[I]f all goes well—if the translation succeeds—English-speaking readers have the opportunity to read a convincing poem in their own language, repeating an aesthetic experience comparable to that of their Spanish-speaking counterparts. (Grossman 100)

Good poetic translation, in Felstiner’s estimation, “results from care and invention together—the fused warmth of continual compromise, trying as

much as possible for both the letter and the spirit” (“Neruda” 236–37). Paz suggests that a good translator will produce “a poem analogous although not identical to the original poem,” a statement that harkens back to Felstiner’s concept of the translated poem as a “new utterance” or “new incarnation” of the original. The “aesthetic experience,” therefore, should be “comparable” or “analogous” to the original, even if an identical experience is virtually impossible. A good translator is one that successfully reproduces the experiential aspect of poetry. Felstiner proposes that a good translator “moves between two extremes, neither settling for literalism nor leaping into improvisation, but somehow shaping a poem that is likewise inalienable and organic” (*Translating* 30). Paz realizes that the best translator of poetry should be “a translator who is also a poet [...] or a poet who is also a good translator” (158). He points out, however, the disparity between theory and practice: “In theory, only poets should translate poetry; in practice, poets are rarely good translators. They almost invariably use the foreign poem as a point of departure toward their own” (158). This last point, that of poets using the experience of translation as a source of inspiration, is particularly germane to our discussion of Neruda’s reception in the United States, as we shall now see.

Translating Neruda into English

Pablo Neruda was mentioned in North American poetry magazines as early as 1925, and English translations of varying quality appeared in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.³ Before World War II, Neruda was “a little-known yet representative Latin American poet of erotic love, urban alienation, Spain, and Stalingrad” (14). During the Cold War, Neruda “became a quasi-political figure whose Whitmanesque *Let the Rail Splitter Awake!* and other militant excerpts from *Canto general* turned up regularly in the Marxist publication *Masses and Mainstream*” (Felstiner, *Translating* 14). By the early 1960s, “Neruda was a belatedly recognized presence,” receiving honors from “Yale, Oxford, the Library of Congress, the Modern Language Association,” and eventually the Nobel Prize in 1971. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s, however, that his poetry saw a flourish of multiple English-language translations (Cohen, “Early History” 272; “Establishing” 25). Numerous hands aided in bringing Neruda over to English, from professors of Romance languages to the brightest American poets of that generation. These two camps, however, often had distinct agendas in translating Neruda, which resulted in tense squabbling among those in the literary community. The central issue

³ The poet-translator Muna Lee mentions *Crepusculario* as early as June 1925 in a special issue of *Poetry* dedicated to Latin America. Willis Knapp Jones, in 1929, briefly discusses *Crepusculario*, as well. The following year, Neruda is mentioned in T.S. Eliot’s magazine, *The Criterion*. Charles K. Colhoun reviews three of Neruda’s poems, which had previously appeared in Ortega y Gasset’s magazine, *Revista de Occidente*. In 1932, Henry Alfred Holmes publishes *Spanish American in Song and Story*, an anthology of Spanish texts with English commentary (Cohen, “Early History” 272–73).

focused on literal vs. liberal translations. Each group accused the other of distorting Neruda's poetic voice. In spite of this controversy, and several poor translations, Neruda's overall reception and influence was not hindered. In fact, the overwhelming majority of the US literary establishment, including poets, translators, critics, publishers, scholars, and readers alike, fully embraced Pablo Neruda, not only as a great Latin American poet, but also as a wellspring of inspiration to revitalize North American poetry.

Neruda's reception in the United States was delayed significantly throughout the 1930s and 1950s, especially when one considers the increasing acclaim he received in Europe and Latin America. He was often the victim of poor, misrepresentative translations that portrayed his verse in a clunky, jerky, and sometimes archaic, style.⁴ Although Felstiner and Cohen mention some of these "failed" translations in their respective studies, neither discusses in detail to what extent they affected the reception and influence of Neruda in the United States.

⁴ In 1934, G. Dundas Craig's bilingual collection, *The Modernist Trend in Spanish-American Poetry*, brought forth the earliest verse translations of Neruda in English. Cohen argues that Craig did a disservice to Neruda because of the poor quality of the translations: "Craig burdened the English with clumsy Latinate words, even false cognates, and followed the Spanish word order slavishly" ("Establishing" 176). In 1942, Dudley Fitts published *Anthology of Contemporary Latin-American Poetry* in a bilingual format, with literal renderings designed to bring the reader to a close approximation of the original Spanish (see Cohen, "Establishing" 177 and the preface in Fitts 33). In 1943, H. R. Hays published his own anthology of Latin American poetry, *Twelve Spanish American Poets*, after having appeared in Fitts's aforementioned anthology. Felstiner calls his translations "terse, literal, yet fairly idiomatic" (*Translating* 15). The first book-length collection of Neruda's poetry, in fact, did not appear until 1946, when New Directions published about half of *Residencia en la tierra* and selections of *Canto general de Chile* as *Residence on Earth and Other Poems* (Cohen, "Early History" 274, Felstiner, *Translating* 15). Felstiner sees Angel Flores's translation as "a hybrid idiom that flattens and rationalizes Neruda's strangest creations" (15).

Cohen, however, argues that we must consider Neruda's own literary sensibilities and political leanings as factors that hindered the overall reception of these early translations:

In the first place, Neruda was a surrealist, and his style of writing was at odds with the poetics of leading critics and poets. Secondly, Neruda was an ardent communist who actively supported Stalinist propaganda. Consequently, during the years of the Cold War and New Criticism, the appearance of Neruda in English did little to establish his reputation as a great poet or to influence poets in the United States. ("Establishing" 25)

Felstiner also discusses the effect Neruda's politics and the literary atmosphere of the United States had on his overall reception. He argues that Neruda's "Stalinist orientation" was not the only impediment; rather, these "new poems" were "politically simplistic" and "did not much tempt the serious translator" (20). Likewise, he sees the New Criticism movement as a possible contributing factor to Neruda's tepid reception, but he realizes "this is impossible to demonstrate" (21).⁵

By the 1960s, North American poets were "emphasizing freedom of form and feelings" and they "sought new ways to create poetry in English that would liberate them from the dominant formalist modes" (Cohen, "Establishing" 25). At this point, both Neruda's surrealist style and *engagé* poetry captured the attention of a young generation of poets,

⁵ Felstiner provides the following overview of the New Criticism movement and how it may have had an effect on the unenthusiastic reception of Neruda: "The New Criticism favored a poetry whose significance lay within an interwoven, ironic structure. Readers had the job of carefully unpacking what the poet had carefully packed, and indeed fine perceptions followed from this approach. But New Critics seldom dealt with poetry in translation, and even then they might have had trouble keeping Neruda's political motives disengaged from the angry demands his verse could make" (21).

many translating foreign poets—including Neruda—to explore new styles and unique approaches to language. With the onset of the Vietnam War, more and more poets sought the “nourishing political style” of Neruda (“Establishing” 27). They also yearned to share Neruda’s “strong political vantage point, and to overcome the anti-Communist, xenophobic isolation” present in the United States (Felstiner 231). As Cohen observes:

English translations of Neruda’s poetry enjoyed an ever-expanding popularity in the late 1960s. Translators—predominantly poets, not Spanish teachers—were publishing their efforts in all kinds of magazines, especially little magazines and anthologies. (“Establishing” 27)

That North American poets were the predominant translators of foreign poets lies in stark contrast to prose translation of the same time period, which was carried out, for the most part, by professors and graduate students from Romance language departments. Again, US poets turned to Latin American poetry as a wellspring of inspiration, in hopes to revitalize their own poetry.⁶ William Meredith, poet and translator, observed in 1979: “many poets [...] believe that major directions for poetry in our country will derive from the aesthetic innovations of [...] Latin American poets” (15). Willis Barnstone, in an article published in *Poetry* in 1967, points out that US poetry was “revitalizing itself in many ways: finding a new passion, a clear image, a new root in nature [...] the energy and visual floodtide of Neruda” (47). Anne Sexton, winner of the

⁶ The way in which American poets found inspiration in Neruda is similar to Borges’s effect on prose writers of the 1960s, such as John Barth, as we have seen.

Pulitzer Prize for poetry, commented on the role Neruda's poetry had on her and her generation: "We are being influenced now by South American poets, Spanish poets, French poets. We are much more image-driven as a result [...]. Neruda is the great image-maker. [...] That's why I say you have to start with Neruda" (11-12). In the case of Neruda, we see one of the clearest cases of reception and influence, "for, in having translated Neruda themselves, several major US poets were affected in their own poetry" (Cohen, "Establishing" 25). Cohen continues:

They were attracted to Neruda's image-driven language, his eruptive style of using objects abstractly for the emotional colors produced by the impact of their associations, and the way his writing closes the gap between poetry and real life. ("Controversy" 179)

By the late 1960s, Neruda was widely translated, both for his poetic sensibilities and his engagement in political and social causes through poetry. Neruda's poetry "finally established itself in translation as a major new American voice in the literature of the United States" (Cohen, "Establishing" 25). Cohen continues:

Many US poets became deeply involved with translating Neruda in the 1960s because they wanted to provide an alternative to the formal, rationalistic modernism that had dominated the poetry scene in previous decades and that was aided and abetted by the prevailing New Criticism. (Cohen, "Establishing" 27)

These poet-translators, including Ben Belitt, Robert Bly, James Wright, W. S. Merwin, Clayton Eshleman, Alastair Reid, and Nathaniel Tarn,

“began to produce much freer, highly impressionistic paraphrases⁷ of Neruda” (Cohen, “Controversy” 179–80). In many cases, “the English version became more important to them than the original poem in Spanish” (180).

Significant controversy surrounded the various approaches to translating Neruda in the 1960s, which centers principally on the issue of literal vs. liberal translations. On one hand, the professors of Romance languages that translated Neruda tended to offer more literal, straightforward, and not very creative renderings. The poet-translators, on the other hand, took significant liberties, producing translations that bordered on imitations of the originals.⁸

In spite of the diverse approaches to translating Neruda in the 1960s and early 1970s, scholars and poets alike embraced Neruda in an overwhelmingly positive reception. Even though some of these translations were less than ideal, it was more than enough to introduce an English-reading audience to Neruda’s ever-evolving aesthetic and image-driven poetic sensibility. Even so, Neruda’s reception was

⁷ In “On Translation,” the preface to his translation of *Ovid’s Epistles*, John Dryden divides translations into three categories: First is “metaphrase, or turning an author word by word, and line by line, from one language to another.” Second is “paraphrase, or translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense; and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not altered.” Third is “imitation, where the translator (if now he has not lost that name) assumes the liberty, not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion; and taking only some general hints from the original, to run division on the groundwork, as he pleases” (17).

⁸ Cohen examines this tension in great detail, by analyzing several versions of “Walking Around,” in “Neruda in English: The Controversy Over Translation Poetics.” John Felstiner also discusses this issue in “Neruda in Translation,” as well as the first chapter of *Translating Neruda*.

blemished by poor translations. After Neruda's death in 1973, *The Nation* published the following regarding the multiple translations in English:

Neruda's poetry is in general ill-served by its English translations—through no fault of the scholars who have done the translating, some of them accomplished poets in their own right. The fault lies with the demotic speech that industrial society has fostered, and with the variant employed by literary men writing in the English in our day. Poetry is above all the art of evoking powerful emotions through verbal music, and Neruda's exuberant Spanish has its counterpart in the English poetry of the Renaissance rather than in the sober dialect of our contemporary major poets—or the willful stridencies of some of our lesser writers. Neruda in translation tends to sound inflated and bombastic. Nothing could be less true of the original. (357–58).

Certainly some translated Neruda more deftly than others, but this article reminds us that there are profound differences, both linguistic and cultural, between Spanish and English. Even Neruda knew that his poetry suffered in English, not necessarily due to the inadequacies of his translators, but to these fundamental differences. He knew English well enough to know that it did not “correspond to Spanish—neither in vocalization, nor in placement, nor the color, nor the weight of the words” (*Seven Voices* 35). Neruda discusses the implications of these differences in verse translation in an interview with Rita Guibert:

This means that the equilibrium of a Spanish poem, which may be written with verbal lavishness or economy, but has its own order and way of placing each word, can find no equivalent in [...] English. It's not a question of interpretive equivalents, no; the sense may be correct, indeed the accuracy of the translation itself, of the meaning, may be what destroys the poem. [...] It seems to me that the English language, so different from Spanish and so much more

direct, often expresses the meaning of my poetry but does not convey its atmosphere. (*Seven Voices* 35–36)

Neruda's observations bring us full circle to our discussion on the nature of poetry and the intricacies of verse translation. Each poet and translator has his or her opinion as to what constitutes a good poem, and consequently, a good translation. Many, as we have read, attempt to define that one crucial element that is apparently lost in verse translation. Whether it is tone, rhythm, sound, beat or musicality, or some elusive facet lost in a series of dichotomies—image vs. matter, spirit vs. letter, sense vs. word, connotation vs. denotation, or as Neruda puts it, the atmosphere—poetry, like no other genre presents seemingly insurmountable challenges when transferring it from one language to another. We must be patient with our translators, realizing that theirs is a labor of love. We must celebrate and cherish their efforts because theirs is an act of generosity. Finally, and I do not think anyone would disagree, if we truly wish to *read* poetry, the best way is to do so in the original language. But until the effects of the Tower of Babel are reversed, we must embrace verse translation and all its complexities.

Nathaniel Tarn's *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*

The first complete English translation of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*, translated by H. R. Hays, appeared in 1948 in *The Tiger's Eye*, a journal of arts and literature published in New York from 1947 to 1949. Felstiner comments that Hays “does a good deal of justice to what Neruda wrote”

in this “first full go at a complex, unprecedented poem” (17). Nevertheless, he sees occasional errors in his approach: “Here and there it shows signs of uncertainty: words and phrases mistaken or misunderstood, syntax misplaced, lines rendered roughly” (17). These errors, for the most part, can be attributed to Hays’s hesitancy, as Felstiner notes: “Throughout, Hays seems unsure how much liberty he ought to take with this imposing work. Yet generally his translation does not suffer by remaining close to the original” (*Translating* 17). The second translation, rendered by the famous choreographer and dancer Waldeen, appeared in a pamphlet called *Let the Rail Splitter Awake and Other Poems*. The pamphlet, published by the Marxist monthly *Masses and Mainstream*, also included “various explicitly militant poems by Neruda and a 1949 speech,” which gave the poem a “partisan stamp that attracted some readers and put off others” (19). Felstiner makes the following comment regarding Waldeen’s translation: “She does not seem at home with the intensely troubled, expressionist quality of the poem’s early cantos, but translated the more outspoken Macchu Picchu cantos quite firmly” (19). In 1950, Whit Burnett included Angel Flores’s translation of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* as part of the widely circulated “The World’s Best” series (Felstiner, *Translating* 19).

The first mass-marketed edition, however, appeared in 1966 with Nathaniel Tarn’s translation, which also included the original in Spanish. Figueroa deems Tarn’s translation better than Belitt’s selections of

Alturas in *Selected Poems*, but she finds Flores's 1944 translation superior (340). She even calls Tarn's translation elegant but suggests that certain passages are careless and, ultimately, unacceptable (341). Early reviews, although positive, suggest that Tarn's translation comes up short due to the difficulty in rendering Neruda's ambiguous and sinuous syntax along with the polysemic nature of the poetic imagery. M. L. Rosenthal states: "Nathaniel Tarn's translation, conscientious and suggestive, misses some of the rhythmic and echoing cues and too often sacrifices a chance to evoke the sound and syntax of the original." She admits, however, that Tarn's translation "[catches] the luxuriant ambiguity, the delicate exploration, and the power of many passages." "Since the Spanish and English are given on facing pages," she continues, "the reader may compete with the translator" (25). In 1967, in reviewing Tarn's translation for the *New York Times Book Review*, fellow translator Dudley Fitts makes the following comment regarding the difficulty of translating Neruda:

It is difficult to exaggerate the seriousness of the problems that must be faced by the translator of a complex, richly nuanced poem. Usually he must settle for approximations, even in passages of relative simplicity. In the work of Pablo Neruda, where language can be so dense, so ambiguous, and where, moreover, the poet's ecstatic élan is constantly setting up hurdles of rhythmic and syntactical dislocation and all sorts of crosscurrents of sound and metaphor, even approximation must fall short of the mark. ("Review" 26)

In spite of the enormous challenges of translating Neruda and any perceived shortcomings of this particular work, Fitts, like Rosenthal,

ultimately assesses Tarn's translation positively. He also points out the advantage of publishing it in a bilingual format: "Mr. Tarn is to be congratulated upon deciding to print the Spanish text opposite the English and to follow it, as nearly line for line as possible, in his version" (26). Tarn's translation, while linked to and approximating the original, must be considered as a separate work of literature, as Fitts reminds us: "No one knows better than he that the result is not Neruda's poem; but it is a poem, frequently an impressive one, in its own right [...]" ("Review" 26). Writing for *Poetry* in June 1968, James Wright also offers praise to Tarn for accepting the challenge of tackling *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*:

He has tried to solve the most difficult poem by Neruda which involves not only the stylistic and imaginative brilliance of the great poet's language but also his formal mastery of these elements which enables Neruda to illuminate for us some of the meanings of life. Although personally I would hem and haw over this and that detail of Mr. Tarn's translation, I have to confess that I think it is a beautiful poem in the English language, worthy of the noble and spacious poem which identifies Neruda as one of the precious few great masters of our time and of any time (29–30).

Although noting that it is not perfect, Fitz and Lowe point out that Tarn's translation "re-created Neruda's marvelous original in such a way that one truly can gain at least a sense of the Spanish text's semantic and cultural complexity." Tarn's bilingual edition "afforded English-speaking readers in the late 1960s a reliable guide through the political, cultural, and aesthetic challenges of Neruda's daunting and controversial American vision" (33).

In the case of Tarn's translation, it is much easier to show where it "fails," or comes up short, by showing where other translations succeed. Certainly there is no dearth of excellent translations. John Felstiner published *Translating Neruda: The Way to Macchu Picchu* in 1980, which includes his translation as well as a rigorous critical study of translation theory and his personal experience in translating Neruda. Margaret Sayers Peden, another prominent translator of Latin American literature, praises Felstiner's book as "the first book-length study in what will be an increasingly important area of literary criticism: the translator as critic" ("Review" 5). Felstiner even compares sections of the poem with Tarn's translation to demonstrate how he worked through tricky passages. Felstiner respects Tarn's endeavor to translate *Alturas*, even though he disagrees with a number of his renderings:

Nathaniel Tarn takes a number of dramatic risks, some successful, some not, and provides a strong, at times memorable, reading. Tarn's problems are those inherent in translating any poem of such intensely gathered meanings, as well as those he might have overcome. ("Neruda in Translation" 241)

We also have Jack Schmitt's translation of *Alturas*, published in 1990, as part of the first complete edition of *Canto general* in English. Roberto González Echevarría, who provided the introduction, considers Schmitt's effort "a truly remarkable poetic achievement in its own right" (12). He extols the fact that Schmitt makes Neruda sound "original, powerful, authentic" in English while avoiding the Whitmanesque quality of previous translations ("Introduction" 12). In celebration of the

impending centennial celebration of Neruda's birth, two new translations of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* surfaced. Barry Brukoff coupled his photography of the Incan ruins with Stephen Kessler's translation in an exquisite edition. Mark Eisner edited a bilingual edition of selected poems that included his translations of seven of the twelve Cantos for *The Essential Neruda*, an anthology celebrating the centennial of Neruda's birth in 2004. What is interesting about Eisner's method is that he referred to the translations of Felstiner, Kessler, and Stephen Mitchell in recreating Neruda's text. This approach of building upon previous translations reiterates Rabassa's idea that "a translation is never finished, that it is open and could go on to infinity" ("Snowflakes" 7).

A close reading of Tarn's translation offers a glimpse into his interpretation of the poem. Tarn consistently misinterprets and misconstrues the original, thus leading the reader astray. We must, however, keep in mind the following caveat: a "failed" translation is not always a "bad" translation. In fact, Tarn's *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* is elegant, majestic, and eloquent in its own right. Nevertheless, the voice we hear throughout is that of Tarn and not Neruda. Felstiner, in contrast, attempted to retain as much as possible of the poet's voice in his translation. As part of his preparation, Felstiner studied three recordings of Neruda reading *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*. This helped him "pick up vocal tones, intensities, rhythms, and pauses" that revealed how

Neruda initially “heard a word, a phrase a line, a passage” (*Translating* 151). Felstiner continues:

To get from the poet’s voice into another language and into a translator’s own voice is the business of translation. It depends on a moment-by-moment shuttle between voices, for what translating comes down to is listening—listening now to what the poet’s voice said, now to one’s own voice as it finds what to say. (*Translating* 151)

Felstiner recognizes the importance of transmitting the voice of the poet from one language to another. Tarn, however, imposes his own voice upon that of Neruda and consequently imposes his own interpretation upon the poem. Felstiner sees himself as an intermediary “to go between but not get between the author and the reader” (*Translating* 151). Granted, the translator must make “local choices in diction and phrasing that tune the new version as it goes,” but Tarn breaks up long syntactic chains with unnecessary pauses, by inserting punctuation or reformatting the original layout, or he embellishes Neruda’s simple telluric imagery.

In his introduction to Tarn’s translation, Robert Pring-Mill identifies the ambiguous syntax and multivalent nature of the language as central to unraveling the meaning of *Alturas*:

Neruda works with ambiguities, not stating but suggesting, and usually suggesting a number of different lines of thought and feeling at any given time. It is this feature of his approach, which makes his poetry so extraordinarily hard to translate, and he exploits the full range of ambiguity by means of numerous technical devices. Thus, no sooner has the sequence opened than it moves into a web of two-way syntax that creates conflicting patterns of association around the imagery. (xii)

Neruda's ambiguous syntax moves in multiple directions while the poetic images he employs cover a wide semantic field, intersecting, overlapping, and at times pulling the meaning in conflicting, and at times contradictory, directions. He presents antithetical images, but rarely is there a sense of Hegelian synthesis or resolution in these binary pairings. He stretches the linguistic sign to its furthest reaches, almost to the point of rupture, a reality that challenges even the most assiduous students and critics in reading the poem.

That *Alturas* presents a formidable translation challenge reinforces the importance of a solid translation in English for those that do not have access to the original in Spanish. Pring-Mill continues in his observations on the difficulties of translating Neruda, and particularly *Alturas*:

Ambiguous syntax is one of the most fascinating aspects of Neruda's manner of proceeding in all his complex poems, yet it is a feature, which is peculiarly tantalizing to translators. They can rarely hope to establish a corresponding ambiguity, and therefore have either to opt between layers of meaning, or else to give the grammatical sense of a single layer while trying to suggest the others by words which carry heightened and conflicting associations, as Tarn does. (xii)

This proves particularly difficult for translators when attempting to untangle the vast network of sinuous and ambiguous syntax. Because of the significant syntactical differences between Spanish and English, the translator is forced to choose between multiple possibilities, which at times concretizes and restricts an otherwise amorphous phrase. As we will see, Tarn is at times successful in finding a corresponding image or

turn of phrase even when faced with the challenge of selecting one among a number of possible words. More often than not, however, Tarn manipulates the original in such a way that the translation only vaguely resembles the original. He selects an elevated lexicon when a simple, direct translation would suffice. Tarn's translation approximates the original but either mistranslates or misrepresents fundamental images that Neruda employs, many of which harken back to early poems in his *oeuvre*. The ambiguous nature of the original poem requires the active participation of the reader in constructing meaning. Walter Benjamin refers to the translator as the secret sharer, the intermediary between the original text and the reader. When the translator misinterprets a given passage, an aspect of the original significance is lost, something that the reader cannot recover.

The polysemic nature of Neruda's imagery is especially challenging because many times he will use simple words, but in a particular formation, to draw out complex images, as Pring-Mill observes:

Sometimes, too, a word will have to be intensified because of a degree of abstraction which seems nebulous in English, requiring some kind of concrete rendering to achieve an equivalent impact: this is particularly true of some very frequent terms like *vacío*, or *manantiales*, or *diseminado*, and Neruda's thinking is not necessarily imprecise because such terms seem vague. He has very often taken a fairly neutral word and loaded it with his own associations using it in numerous previous contexts, whose cumulative effect has been to expand and clarify its field of meaning: such terms cannot always be translated here by a single intensified equivalent, since different shades of meaning have to be brought out in different contexts. (xii-xiii)

Felstiner also adds “silencio,” “morada,” “palabra,” “rayo,” and “relámpago” to the long list of words Neruda uses throughout the poem (“Neruda in Translation 241). Felstiner suggests “Tarn might have tried more to bring out the poem’s cumulative force by repeating crucial words Neruda does” (“Neruda in Translation 241). The word *manantial*, for example, appears five times in four cantos, yet Tarn moves further away from the central image than either Felstiner or Schmitt when translating this particular word. By comparing the way in which Tarn translates *manantial* throughout the poem, we can see how his lexical shifts, over the course of the poem, strip the word of its “cumulative force.” By choosing to render *manantial* in a number of different ways, instead of staying close to the central image, Tarn limits Neruda’s process of semantic expansion and clarification.

The word *manantial* means “source,” which the Real Academia Española defines as “nacimiento de las aguas” and “origen y principio de donde proviene algo” (rae.es). Moreover, the specific term *agua manantial* is defined as “la que naturalmente brota de la tierra” (rae.es). Therefore, the word maintains, as Felstiner points out, “the same ambiguity we have between origin and spring” in English (“Neruda in Translation” 241–42). The word first appears as “manantiales marinos” in Canto II:

el hombre arruga el pétalo de la luz que recoge
en los determinados **manantiales marinos** (1:435)

yet man crumples the petal of the light he skims
from the predetermined **sources of the sea** (Tarn 7)

man crumples the petal of light he picks
in the deep-set **springs of the sea** (Felstiner 205)

man crumples the petal of light which he gathers
in determinate **deep-sea springs** (Schmitt 30)

Tarn offers a straightforward, literal rendering, “sources of the sea.” Felstiner, attempting to convey the ambiguity of the meaning “manantial,” renders it as “springs of the sea,” thus capturing both the sense of “origin” and “spring.” Schmitt, maintains the adjectival quality of “marinos” in “deep-sea springs.” Interestingly, Felstiner also interprets the “manantiales marinos” as being deep in the ocean. He does not include that depth in the phrase, “sources of the sea;” rather, he incorporates it into the preceding adjective, “determinados,” which he translates as “deep-set.” Felstiner adroitly combines both the literal image of the phrase and the interpretation that the origin of these “manantiales” is from the deep ocean floor. Tarn’s “predetermined sources of the sea,” while technically an accurate rendering, does not define the location of the “sources of the sea,” opening up the possibility to other sources, such as rivers, streams, or rain. In the end, Tarn offers an acceptable translation, but Schmitt and Felstiner are much more clever and skillful in their renderings.

The second instance, from the same canto, is “agua de manantial encadenado,” which Felstiner interprets “as an image of the vitality and purpose [the poetic voice] cannot find” (“Translating Neruda” 242):

No tuve sitio donde descansar la mano
y que, corriente como **agua de manantial encadenado**,
(1:436)

I had no place in which my hand could rest—
no place running like **harnessed water** (Tarn 8)

I had no place to rest my hand,
none running like **linked springwater** (Felstiner 207)

I had no place to rest my hand,
which, fluid like the **water of an impounded spring**
(Schmitt 31)

They each translate the first verse similarly, diverging slightly in how they handle “y que” at the beginning of the second verse. Our translators, however, diverge significantly in how they translate “agua de manantial encadenado.” Tarn jettisons “manantial” altogether, and interprets “encadenado,” not as “chained,” “linked” or “connected,” which would be the literal definition, but as “harnessed.” His rendering evokes an image of harnessing the energy of the running water—a fair interpretation—but it also constricts and limits that energy, which may or may not be the poet’s original intent. Felstiner sticks to a safe translation, although I would have preferred “chained” to “linked,” since the root of “encadenado” is “cadena.” Felstiner, however, interprets the “linked springwater” as “the terraced conduits at Macchu Picchu,” even though in Canto II the poetic voice still has not arrived to the site (“Neruda in

Translation” 242). Perhaps Felstiner wants to avoid impressions of incarceration, something that Schmitt seems to embrace in his unwieldy rendering: “water of an impounded spring.” Schmitt missteps in all directions, creating a clunky phrase, yet he does create a chain of signifiers, which produces a visual representation of Felstiner’s “linked springwater.” Nevertheless, Schmitt’s interpretation begins to make more sense when we take into account the fact that the title of the ancient Greek tragedy, *Prometheus Bound*, is translated into Spanish as *Prometeo Encadenado*. Both Tarn and Schmitt see the potential of tremendous force as the water pressure builds. Felstiner’s “linked springwater” simply does not convey that same power and energy.

In Canto IV we find the following:

y fué cerrando paso y puerto para que no tocan
mis **manos manantiales** su inexistencia herida, (1:437)

closing his paths and doors so that I could not touch
his wounded inexistence with my **divining fingers** (Tarn 19)

blocking path and door so I would not touch
with my **streaming hands** their wound of emptiness
(Felstiner 211)

and kept blocking path and door so that
my **headspring hands** could not touch his
wounded inexistence (Schmitt 32)

In this instance, Tarn offers a clever translation, in “divining fingers.” This most likely refers to a divining or dowsing rod, a Y-shaped or L-shaped twig, or branch used to find ground water. Tarn’s interpretation, an oblique reference to water—however clever it may be—imposes a

specific image not present in the original. Felstiner again provides a straightforward rendering for the phrase, maintaining the meaning of “spring” but losing that of “origin.” Schmitt, however, encapsulates that ambiguity in “headspring.”

In Canto VIII we find:

deja que el tiempo cumpla su estatura
en su salón de **manantiales rotos**, (1:442)

let time exhaust all measure
in its abode of **broken overtures**—(Tarn 43)

let time extend full span
in its hall of **broken wellsprings**, (Felstiner 223)

let time attain its stature
in its salon of **shattered headsprings**, (Schmitt 37)

As we have come to expect, both Felstiner and Schmitt stay close to the original meaning of the phrase, while Tarn provides a creative, yet divergent, reading. The word *overture* suggests a prelude, proposal, or an orchestral introduction, which possibly retains an indirect reference to “origin” or “beginning.” Nevertheless, Tarn completely eschews any reference to water, which, as we have established, makes up an essential facet of the ambiguous nature of the word. By referring to “wellsprings” or “headsprings,” both Felstiner and Schmitt preserve the underlying meaning of “origin” and “source.” Schmitt’s adjective, “shattered,” while more poetic, adds an intensity or forcefulness not necessarily heard in “roto.” This nuance, however, is negligible in the overall sound and rhythm of the verse.

We find the final use of “manantial” in Canto IX:

Nave enterrada, **manantial de piedra**. (1:443)

Ship-burial, **source of stone** (Tarn 47)

Buried ship, **wellspring of stone**. (Felstiner 227)

Entombed ship, **stone headspring**. (Schmitt 38)

Our translators provide, more or less, equally adequate translations of this verse, in spite of the slight variations between the three renderings. Here, Tarn backs away from an overly creative reading and provides the simple “source of stone.” Felstiner, returns to “wellspring,” which he used in Canto VIII. Likewise, Schmitt sticks to his mainstay, “wellspring,” which he has now used in three of the five instances. Both Felstiner and Schmitt retain the dual-emphasis of “manantial.”

Throughout these five cantos, we have seen more variation and inventive interpretation on Tarn’s part than in the other two. Again, he renders “manantial” as “sources of the sea,” “harnessed water,” “divining fingers,” “broken overtures,” and “source of stone.” Other than a few oblique references, Tarn is unsuccessful in transmitting both the notion of “origin” and “spring” found within the ambiguous “manantial.” Felstiner offers: “springs of the sea,” “linked springwater,” “streaming hands,” “broken wellsprings,” “wellspring of stone.” In four of the five phrases he includes “spring” in his rendering. His usage of “wellspring” evokes a specific location, thus merging the two meanings. Schmitt, in this case, fairs better in maintaining the dual meaning of “manantial,”

but he turns several awkward phrases: “deep-sea springs,” “water of an impounded spring,” “headspring hands,” “shattered headsprings,” “stone headsprings.” We could perform this same kind of close comparative translation analysis for the other words Neruda repeats throughout the poem. These recurring words, neutral on their own, become motifs in *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*. As Pring-Mill points out, this overt repetition, combined with other poetic images, brings out “different shades of meaning” in “different contexts” (xiii). Pring-Mills refers to the “cumulative effect,” what Felstiner calls the “cumulative force,” of the repetition of these loaded words, an act that opens up a wider semantic field of meaning, which ultimately clarifies the overall usage of the motif. Moreover, they cannot be translated adequately by “a single intensified equivalent,” as Pring-Mill notes (xiii). Tarn produces creative and innovative images, but by straying from the central imagery, he limits and weakens their “cumulative effect,” which potentially undermines the reader’s ability to understand the poem effectively. Consequently, Tarn interpolates the text by inserting his own voice and imposing his own interpretation on *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*.

My textual analysis centers on representative sections of Cantos I and V, since a line-by-line reading of each canto would be nit-picky, pedantic, and overbearingly redundant. Although Tarn, much like Belitt, makes stylistic errors on every page, it is not necessary to point out every mistake to classify *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* a “failed” translation.

First, I begin with a close reading of the first stanza of Canto I. This will establish the methodology that I employ throughout my analysis, which examines both elements of style and content, always keeping in mind the overarching theme of that canto and its relationship to the entire poem. While I enter into dialogue with the extant criticism, the purpose of my study is not to analyze every aspect of each canto, since there are numerous studies dedicated to the close textual analysis of *Alturas*, its relationship to *Canto general*, and Neruda's *oeuvre*.⁹ Nonetheless, I will use supporting statements to elucidate, expand, and clarify the sections of Tarn's translation that I have chosen to analyze. A brief critical overview of the entire poem will provide a contextual foundation for my comparative translation of *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*.

Most studies of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* divide the poem into two sections. In Cantos I–V the poetic voice reflects upon his existential angst in face of the material and modern world. Loveluck notes that the first five stanzas represent “la historia de una agonía existencial” while the final cantos form “la alabanza, más que la elegía, de la ciudad muerta, de la ‘madre de piedra’” (177). Loveluck continues:

⁹ In 1988, Donald Shaw published “Interpretations of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*,” a critical overview of the majority of Neruda scholarship dealing with this poem. The majority of his article focuses on the second half of the poem since Juan Loveluck's article, “*Alturas de Macchu Picchu*, I–V,” is a detailed reading of the first half. In addition to the Pring-Mill and Felstiner studies we have seen, Shaw cites the following: Enrico Mario Santí, *Pablo Neruda: The Poetics of Prophecy*; Hernán Loyola, *Ser y morir en Pablo Neruda, 1918–1945*; Dieter Saalman, “The Role of Time in Pablo Neruda's *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*,” Kay Engler “Image and Structure in Neruda's *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*,” Juan Larrea, *Del surrealismo a Macchu Picchu*; Noé Jitrik, “*Alturas de Macchu Picchu*,” Cedomil Goic, “*Alturas de Macchu Picchu*, la torre y el abismo.”

En términos gruesos, diríamos que la muerte cotidiana, la asfixia de la vida vacía, la inautenticidad son reveladas en la primera parte del poema; el hacer en la hermandad, en lo solidario, en la segunda, a través de la contundente ejemplaridad de la ciudad enclavada en la ‘atroz maraña.’” (177)

Loveluck lists the various elements of *ennui*, apathy, and anxiety present in the first half of the poem: “[F]atiga ante la rutina, noción de vaciedad e incomunicación, carencia de toda tensión vital, inautenticidad, existir angustiado, mineralización de un vivir casi objetal, degradante, sin urgencias ni compromisos que rediman” (178). This daily death of man, or “la muerte pequeña,” introduced in Canto III, makes up the central image of this section, which, according to Shaw, is “the meditation on death in the context of modernity” (“Interpretations” 188).

In Canto I, the poetic voice wanders through streets, a bohemian, “seeking inwards and downwards,” searching for meaning and fulfillment in his life (Pring-Mill xiii). The “red vacía,” an image of double emptiness, represents “el inútil esfuerzo por aprehender sentido” (Loveluck 179). There are days of intensity and physical pleasure (“días de fulgor en la intemperie / de los cuerpos”), yet the lyrical voice finds no fulfillment. He descends even further into the infernal abyss, occasionally experiencing moments of ecstasy, but all he finds is “la gastada primavera humana.” In Canto II, the speaker consistently juxtaposes images of modern man in the industrialized city (“la ropa,” “el humo,” “la triste mercancía,” “las calles [...] de una ciudad” “un autobús,” “un barco”) with elements of nature (“la flor,” “la roca,” “el ciruelo,” “el rocío,” “el mar,” “el cereal,” “el

invierno,” “el otoño”). This section of the poem “contrasts the enduring values of self-perpetuating nature, as rich and fecund in the rocks as in the seed, with man grinding things down until he finds his own soul left impoverished” (Pring-Mill xiii). The poetic voice searches for “lo indestructible, lo imperecedero” of life, what he sees in “lo solidario vegetal-mineral” (Loveluck 181), but he finds no fulfillment in “la noche de fiesta” or “el placer humano.” He faces the great ontological questions regarding the existence and purpose of human life.

Cantos III and IV introduce the concepts of “la pequeña muerte” and “la poderosa muerte.” This section reinforces the question of man’s existence in the modern world, “la distracción del ser en pequeñas agonías de la vida cotidiana,” (Loveluck 184) and the fact that urban man “is whittled away by routine living” (Pring-Mill xiv). The individual is reduced to an automaton, dying a little each day, “cada día una muerte pequeña.”¹⁰ The poetic voice, at the end of Canto IV, experiences his own death, or rather, the death of his modern self. Canto V, in a series of surrealistic images, defines this death of self. The poetic voice descends further into the depths of ontological demise, finally accepting the futility of his search for fulfillment, only to find “una racha fría / que entraba por los vagos intersticios del alma.” As Pring-Mill comments, “this is the lowest, coldest stage of the whole sequence” (xv). In the first five cantos, the poetic voice falls to the lowest depths of the soul, where he

¹⁰ See also Mario Rodríguez Fernández’s “El tema de la muerte en *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* de Pablo Neruda.”

experiences the death of the modern sense of self. Critics, such as Pring-Mill and Loyola, according to Shaw, “emphasize the contrast between the negativity of Cantos I–V followed by the achievement of ‘collective permanence’ in Canto VII” (186). Loyola argues, that in order to understand *Alturas*, “es categóricamente imprescindible tener en cuenta su condición de poema-síntesis” (197). He continues:

La significación del poema radica en el hecho de reflejar el punto culminante de una encrucijada dialéctica, [...] Balance y rumbo nuevo. [...] Porque no es casual que *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* implique, inclusive en la disposición de sus partes, una suma sintética de revisiones hacia el pasado y de propósitos hacia el futuro [...]. (197–98)

Throughout *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*, Neruda sets up binary oppositions, some of which we have already seen in these first five cantos: modernity and nature, death and life, descent and ascent, past and present, the individual vis-à-vis the collective sexual desire vs. fraternal love. Roberto González Echevarría adds that the theme of violence and betrayal is a prevailing undercurrent that sweeps through the conversion of the poetic voice:

The Heights of Macchu Picchu, like all the literature of ascent [...] is a poem of conversion. It is here that Neruda’s vision is refocused by the presence of these ruins, testament to a utopia in the past, an allegiance of a collectivity with nature to create beauty and justice. It is an allegiance also marred by violence, abuse, and betrayal. It is also here that the poet meets death, in a descent to the regions of the dead reminiscent of Homer, Virgil, and Dante (“Introduction” 7)

As I pointed out earlier, however, Neruda rarely offers Hegelian synthesis in these antithetical pairings. It is up to the reader to explore and

interpret the interstices. Whereas Loyola finds a clear sense of synthesis and resolution, other critics simply see juxtaposition and contrast. Certainly critical readings diverge in the details, but this brief summary is a generally accepted account of the first part of the poem.

Once the poetic voice reaches Macchu Picchu in Canto VI, however, he finds solidarity and hope in the memory of the people that built the ancient city. The lyrical self rises up out of the depths of individual death, and as he ascends to Macchu Picchu he moves backward in time to a primordial point where the vertices of past, present, and future intersect. In the joyful contemplation of “una permanencia de piedra y de palabra” and “la rosa permanente, la morada” of Canto VII, he sees a possible victory over “la pequeña muerte” of modern man. Shaw notes: “We can [...] readily perceive the contrasting presentation of Macchu Picchu and its builders in terms of collective death and symbolic permanence, as against the trivial contingency of modern death” (Shaw 189). Most critics see this moment as positive, noting “the apparently triumphant tone of Canto VII” (Shaw 186). The poetic voice, in examining “what endures and what has vanished,” finds the death of the Incan workers to be nobler “because it was a collective death” (Pring-Mill xvi). Shaw, in citing Goic, points out that the poetic voice eventually progresses beyond the joyful contemplation of these images, as well as the jubilant expression of hope: “A process of thought which after *celebrating Macchu Picchu*, both at the Latin American level

as a symbol of the triumph of the collectivity over individual death, goes on to *question* that celebration” (187). Santí insists on “the radically negative meaning” and the “pervasive nihilism” of the central cantos (144–46). Santí does not see a notable difference between “la poderosa muerte” of the Incans and “la pequeña muerte” of modern man. “Individual mortality, as portrayed in the first half of the poem,” Santí argues, “[appears] insignificant in comparison with the magnitude of cultural annihilation” (144). Shaw points out that Santí’s reading diverges significantly from “the accepted consensus” of critics (188). Moreover, the poem definitely strikes a more positive tone after these central cantos.

In the remaining cantos, the lyrical voice seeks “[to establish] a living link with the past which, in a dialectical relationship with the present, will help to forge the future” (Shaw, “Interpretations” 195). In Canto VIII the poetic voice calls for an “amor americano” for pre-columbian man, which he uses “to transfuse the present and embrace the future (anticipating the more personal summons to his “brothers” in XI)” (Pring-Mill xvii). In a series of questions to the Urubamba River, known as Wilkamayu to the ancient inhabitants, the speaker seeks “deeper truths about the city’s original condition” (Felstiner, *Translating* 178). Shaw points out that the phrase “El reino muerto vive todavía” is not the climax of the canto, but is followed by the “final sinister reference” to “la sombra sanguinaria del condor” (187). This pairing,

according to Felstiner, “reminds us that this dead realm still lives in a threatened time” (179). Canto IX is a mysterious litany (Shaw 189), which Pring-Mill describes in the following:

A solemn and incantatory chant made up of units based on interlocking metaphors, [...] building up to a final pair of lines which brings us starkly back both to the great mass of men who raised the citadel and to the one-way thrust of man-slaying time. (xvii)

This canto foreshadows the shift in the final three cantos by juxtaposing positive and negative imagery in a series of metaphors. Shaw suggests “the images which are applied to the city sometimes deliberately portend the thematic shift which is about to overtake the poem.” Calling the city “roca sanguinaria,” for example, Neruda “[uses] an adjective applied not long before to the shadow of the condor, associated with death” (189–90). Throughout the poem, as we have seen, the speaker reiterates the prevalent themes of death, time, and the yearning to connect with the people of the past with the intent of revivifying their memory in the present.

In Canto X there is a dramatic shift in tone, from a “hermetic kind of discourse,” of the first half of the poem to “the more direct—ideologically inspired—mode of expression” found in much of *Canto general* (Shaw 194). Shaw states: “In the context of *Alturas* itself, this coincides with a shift from the elegy, in which a single poetic voice speaks for itself, to the ode of hymn, a collective statement, whose *persona* is that of the collectivity” (194). As the speaker takes on the

collective identity of the lives he has been praising, the tone shifts from “the metaphysical to the political” (Shaw 194). Shaw, as well as Pring-Mill, argues that the poetic voice begins to question his assumptions of the redemptive nature of the ancient city as expressed in Cantos VI and VII. He continues: “The poet is assailed by the realization that the lives of the builders of Macchu Picchu may have been no different from those of modern man” (191). The “geometrical precision of the citadel” may have been “erected on a base of human suffering” (Pring-Mill xviii). Nevertheless, Felstiner, echoing Goic, argues that the two parts fit together; “one vision responds to the other” (184).

In Canto XI the poet “turns deliberately away from the city of Macchu Picchu” and “calls on the spirit of love of America, which has silently accompanied him from the opening of the poem” (Shaw 192). He returns to the prevalent image of descent, “[plunging] into the depths of humanity, to re-emerge with ‘un ramo de agua secreta,’ a hidden fount of suppressed and hitherto overlooked truths” (192).¹¹ The poetic voice returns to the image of the condor, that is, of death, which has followed him throughout the poem. Shaw observes:

[H]e no longer sees it abstractly (as he had implicitly done in the meditation on death and on the collective triumph over it earlier in the poem). Now he sees it concretely in terms of the deaths of real human individuals, the ancient Inca serfs, [...] the representatives of the exploited masses. (Shaw 192)

¹¹ See also Felstiner’s reading of the verb *caer* in this canto (*Translating* 187–89).

The poetic voice has been “fascinated, gratified, [and] exalted” by the ruins, but now he looks away from its splendor and turns his attention to “the bodies of men and women asleep or dead at Macchu Picchu” (Felstiner, *Translating* 189). Felstiner continues: “If Neruda did not turn on the city in this way, demanding to forget the unforgettable structure of it, *Macchu Picchu* would remain a powerful but conventional meditation” (189). Instead, he looks to the fallen Incan workers—Juan Cortapedras, Juan Comefrío, Juan Piesdescalzos, and calls them forth: “sube a nacer conmigo, hermano.”

In the final canto, the climax of the poem, the poetic voice acts as an intermediary, a spokesperson for this fallen people, speaking their words through his mouth. “In reviewing himself,” Felstiner observes, “the poet would bring others to a kind of rebirth” (*Translating* 191). Shaw sees that “‘la poderosa muerte’ of the long-dead masses is in some sense completed or redeemed” (188). Critics offer different, sometimes conflicting, interpretations of Canto XII, which we will examine in greater detail in the textual analysis of this chapter.

In this section I closely examine Canto I of Nathaniel Tarn’s translation by comparing it with the original and the respective translations of John Felstiner and Jack Schmitt. The analysis is concerned first and foremost with Tarn’s stylistic modifications, namely his changes to syntax and lexicon. By triangulating Tarn’s translations with those of Felstiner and Schmitt, we will see that Tarn strips away

much of the ambiguous and serpentine syntax of the original. We will also observe his lexical embellishments that alter the simplicity of Neruda's language. The combination of simple vocabulary with complex syntax is one of the defining characteristics of the first five cantos of *Alturas*. Tarn's changes pose a significant challenge to the nonspecialist reader since he waters down one aspect of the style while elevating another.

Del aire al aire, como una red vacía,
iba yo entre las calles y la atmósfera, llegando y despidiendo,
(1:434)

From air to air, like an empty net,
dredging through streets and ambient atmosphere, I came
(Tarn 3)

The famous first verse of the opening stanza of Canto I opens with a to-and-fro motion, "del aire al aire." Santí observes that "instability and material dispersion make up the thematic nodes" of the opening verse (*Poetics*, 126). The poetic voice "wanders without progress" ("Del aire al aire") and "appears to be devoid of any content or purpose" ("como una red vacía") (126). The imperfect tense of the opening phrase of the second verse, "iba yo" continues the movement established in the preceding verse. By placing the personal pronoun *after* the verb, the poetic voice asserts his presence. This "yo" stands between the ephemeral and amorphous "aire" and the ebb and flow in the movement of "llegando y despidiendo." The atmosphere creates a spatial separation between the poetic self and the gerunds, both on the physical page and within the

imagery of the poem. Although these gerunds certainly modify the fluctuating movement of the poetic self, they can also be read as modifiers of the air that moves through the atmosphere. Santi comments on this movement: “The use of the imperfect tense conveys the sense of a wavering and uncertain movement, as in a journey without origin or cause, while the lack of syntactical object in the rest of the first stanza conveys the same uncertainty” (*Poetics*, 126). Whereas the original opens up with the fluctuating movement of the poetic voice, Tarn’s translation defines and confines this movement, thus restricting the fluidity and ambiguity of the entirety of the stanza. He rewrites and restructures the second verse, placing the emphasis of the first person singular “I” at the end instead of the beginning, effectively breaking the semi-chiasmic structure of the first and second verses. With the final phrase, “I came,” Tarn combines both the imperfect “iba” and the gerund “llegando” into one verb that transmits a sense of completion, giving it more of a preterit feel. The enjambment of “I came / lavish,” however, opens up that definitive completion, but only slightly. Tarn’s choice of “dredging” seems odd from a semantic perspective, but makes sense from the point of view of euphony. The voiced lingua-alveolar [dʒ] of the “dg” in “dredging” corresponds nicely with the way a Chilean would pronounce “llegando.” Already in the first two verses of the first stanza of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* we clearly see that Tarn modifies and restructures the syntax and

alters the lexicon significantly. The changes are even more drastic when compared with Felstiner and Schmitt:

From the air to the air, like an empty net,
I went on through streets and thin air, arriving and leaving
behind,
(Felstiner 203)

From air to air, like an
empty net
I went between the streets and atmosphere, arriving and
departing,
(Schmitt 29)

Both renderings are noticeably different, especially in their word choice and even in the formatting of the verse, but they more or less follow the syntax and general wording of the original. Felstiner's decision to use the definite article in "From the air to the air" deviates somewhat from "Del aire al aire." He defends his decision, however, in the following:

Though it is often possible to drop the definite article when translating Neruda, here I think his opening movement belongs to "the air" we all live in. That movement also needs protracted rhythm. He is dragging the air, as it were, searching his surroundings for something, coming to the fruits of summer and autumn but then leaving them behind.
(154)

In spite of Felstiner's inclusion of the definite article, all three translations of the opening verse are quite similar. In the second verse, however, Tarn's translation stands out. Overall, Schmitt sticks to a more literal translation whereas Felstiner leaves interpretive fingerprints on his translation. He points out that the "atmósfera" of Macchu Picchu, due to its high elevation, would be "thin air." Nevertheless, we must point out that the poetic voice does not reach Macchu Picchu until Canto VI.

Felstiner also departs slightly in his rendering of “llegando y despidiendo,” which he discusses:

The syntax of these lines has troubled readers and translators, since *llegando y despidiendo* could make an independent until, “arriving and saying goodbye.” But *despedir* may have a stronger transitive meaning here, “dismiss” or “renounce.” Perhaps “leaving behind” splits the difference between saying goodbye and renouncing. (154)

Felstiner, therefore, reads several connotations into the original “llegando y despidiendo” while Schmitt leans more towards the idea of leaving. Interestingly, both Felstiner and Schmitt alter the formatting of the original poem, thus emphasizing or demphasizing certain words and expressions. Overall, their translations—at least to this point—offer an accurate reflection of the meaning and tone of the original.

en el advenimiento del otoño la moneda extendida
de las hojas, y entre la primavera y las espigas, (1:434)

lavish, at autumn’s coronation, with the leaves’
proffer of currency and—between spring and wheat ears—
(Tarn 3)

In the third and fourth verses, Tarn departs significantly from the original in meaning. Again, he chooses to place “iba yo” at the end of the second verse, thus creating enjambment with “I came / lavish” in the third. With the inclusion of the adjective *lavish*—meaning “expending or bestowing profusely” or “expended or produced in abundance, marked by profusion or excess”—Tarn not only introduces an element not found in the original but also alters the tone significantly (Merriam-Webster). Tarn sees “el advenimiento del otoño” as a lavish coronation ceremony full of

pomp and circumstance. Whereas the original hints at the radiant beauty of the leaves changing color in “la moneda extendida / de las hojas,” Tarn continues to embellish this event with “the leaves’ / proffer of currency.” Tarn chooses to set off the phrase “between spring and wheat ears” with dashes where the original simply uses commas. The greater preoccupation here, however, is with his cultural misinterpretation of “espigas.” Neruda does not specify the kind of grain of these “espigas.” Although they could be “espigas de trigo” they could also be “espigas de maíz,” given the eventual destination of the poetic voice, and taking into account that wheat would not have been present at pre-columbian Macchu Picchu since it was introduced by the Europeans. Felstiner and Schmitt translate this section in the following:

at autumn’s advent, the coin handed out
in the leaves, and between spring and ripe grain, (Felstiner
203)

in the advent of autumn the outstretched coin
of leaves, and between springtime and the ears of corn,
(Schmitt 29)

In the third verse, Felstiner adds a comma since he views “la moneda” as the direct object of “despedir” in the preceding verse. Felstiner defends his decision: “No editions have a comma there, but Neruda does pause markedly in two phonograph recordings (the third is noncommittal)” (154). Both render “la moneda extendida” quite distinctly, although both maintain the same basic image of the original. Felstiner argues that “the ‘extended’ coin, calls not only for a visual image but also for a figurative

sense, as in coin ‘handed out’” (154). Regarding the issue of “espigas,” Felstiner also avoids specifying the kind of grain, whereas Schmitt interprets it as “ears of corn.” In either case, both avoid the anachronistic interpretation of Tarn’s translation. In all three translations we lose the occasional internal assonant rhyme of “vacía,” “iba,” and “espiga,” but such is the nature of translation. The translations of Felstiner and Schmitt generally maintain the overall poetic sensibilities of the original. Tarn, however, consistently modifies the syntax and introduces lexical shifts not present in the original, which we see in the final two verses of the first stanza:

lo que el más grande amor, como dentro de un guante
que cae, nos entrega como una larga luna. (1:434)

that which a boundless love, caught in a gauntlet fall,
grants us like a long-fingered moon. (Tarn 3)

the fullness that love, as in a glove’s
fall, gives over to us like a long-drawn moon. (Felstiner 203)

all that the greatest love, as within a falling
glove, hands us like a long moon. (Schmitt 29)

In these final two verses, Tarn continues to embellish the vocabulary of the original while simplifying and restricting the syntax. It appears that Tarn opts for “gauntlet” simply to avoid the trivial rhyme of “love” with “glove.” This is an odd choice since it evokes the image of a suit of armor. Furthermore, the phrase “caught in a gauntlet fall” also brings to mind the expression “throw down the gauntlet,” meaning to extend a challenge. By changing one word, Tarn significantly alters the poetic

imagery of this verse, and consequently the entire stanza. He also removes the enjambment, which further evidences his simplification of Neruda's purposeful sinuous syntax. In contrast, both Felstiner and Schmitt maintain the structure of the verse as well as the simile of "como dentro de un guante" even though they vary in the way in which they translate it. Tarn reflects on the greater implications of this phrase:

Within this same figure, the preposition "dentro" poses a more crucial question. If the fullness of love comes "dentro de un guante que cae," literally "within a glove that falls," does it somehow come within the glove itself or—a more compelling thought—within a moment, "as in a glove's fall?" (155)

Tarn apparently interprets the phrase more concretely, assigning a specific physicality to the "guante que cae." Schmitt, like Felstiner, interprets the image as a moment, while maintaining the simile construction. Each of the three translators presents a different interpretation for the phrase "nos entrega": "grants us," "gives over to us," and "hands us." Tarn translates "entregar" in the sense "to present," but the use of the verb "to grant" also implies an idea of permission or bestowal. Felstiner, in translating this particular phrase, takes into account Neruda's usage of the verb *entregar* elsewhere in his poetry:

And when love "nos entrega" (literally "delivers to us"), which in the first of the *Veinte poemas de amor* suggests passive surrendering, Neruda's verb here can carry as well an active sense of giving. The phrase "give over" blends both ideas [...]" (154–55)

Admittedly, Felstiner takes some artistic license in translating this phrase, but he consistently attempts to incorporate the plurivalent

nature of Neruda's language even if that means making slight alterations to the original meaning. Likewise, Schmitt offers a creative reading. By employing the verb "to hand," in the sense of delivery, he also references the falling glove as a moment in time. Tarn incorporates the image of the hand in the glove over to the final simile in a compelling image: "like a long-fingered moon." Felstiner offers "long-drawn moon" and Schmitt provides the literal "long moon." In this case, Tarn's translation is the most poetic, yet it also diverges the most from Neruda's original simile. The difference between Tarn and Felstiner, in this case—as in others—is that even in his most creative interpretations, Felstiner seldom deviates from the spirit of the original. In contrast, Tarn manipulates structure, simplifies syntax, and he concretizes Neruda's ambiguous imagery by ascribing specific meanings to those images.

Throughout the opening stanza of Canto I, Tarn alters Neruda's original by shuffling and simplifying the syntax yet elevating and embellishing the vocabulary. Felstiner occasionally takes certain creative liberties to avoid an overly literal rendering, but he rarely strays too far from the central imagery. Schmitt tends to err on the side of caution, sticking closely to a straightforward translation, resulting in a faithful but ordinary translation. As we have previously mentioned, Tarn's poem, if taken on its own merits, is a beautiful, compelling, and inspiring poem in English. The problem, and here is where the "failure" resides, is that

The Heights of Macchu Picchu is Nathaniel Tarn's poem, and not Pablo Neruda's.

We have already seen that the way in which Tarn translates “manantial” over the course of the poem weakens the “cumulative effect” of Neruda's constant repetition of this, as well as, other thematic terms. In the preceding section, we analyzed how Tarn simplifies Neruda's sinuous syntax and embellishes his vocabulary, resulting in a misrepresentation of the original. The purpose of this section is to examine in greater detail how Tarn's lexical changes alter the overall reading of a stanza. Canto V is divided into three sentences, verses 1–6, 7–9, and 10–13, of which I will only be analyzing the first two. As previously discussed, the poetic voice in this section of the poem further describes the tension between “la pequeña muerte” and “la poderosa muerte” in a series of surrealistic metaphors. The combined effect of these images reaches its apex in the final two verses: “y no encontré en la herida sino una racha fría / que entraba por los vagos intersticios del alma.” Again, this point is “the lowest, coldest stage of the whole sequence,” (Pring-Mill xv), which is then juxtaposed with the sweeping ascension to Macchu Picchu in Canto VI. Tarn consistently elevates Neruda's simple imagery, resulting in a tonal shift not found in the original. Tarn's alterations also disrupt the polysemy found in these chains of metaphors.

In the first three verses we read:

No eras tú, muerte grave, ave de plumas férreas,
la que el pobre heredero de las habitaciones
llevaba entre alimentos apresurados, bajo la piel vacía:
(1:438)

It was not you, grave death, raptor of iron plumage,
that the drab tenant of such lodgings carried
mixed with his gobbled rations under hollow skin— (Tarn 23)

Solemn death it was not you, iron-plumed bird,
that the poor successor to those dwellings
carried among gulps of food, under his empty skin: (Felstiner
213)

It was not you, solemn death, iron-plumed bird,
that the poor heir of these rooms
carried, between rushed meals, under his empty skin:
(Schmitt 33)

Tarn adequately translates “muerte grave” as “grave death.” Felstiner and Schmitt, perhaps to avoid the synonymous relationship with a burial plot, avoid “grave” and opt for “solemn death.” For “ave de plumas férreas” Tarn gives us “raptor of iron plumage.” The poetic voice, in future cantos, associates the image of the “cóndor” with “la poderosa muerte,” but here the speaker has not specifically identified the “ave” as a bird of prey, and we have not yet arrived at Macchu Picchu. Both Felstiner and Schmitt offer “iron-plumed bird,” allowing the reader to interpret the identity of the bird.

In the second verse, two images stand out: “el pobre heredero” and “las habitaciones.” Although Tarn’s image of a “drab tenant” is compelling, it has nothing to do with Neruda’s poem. Both Felstiner and Schmitt, in contrast, stick to more literal renderings: “poor successor”

and “poor heir.” Tarn’s misreading of “el pobre heredero” spills over to his interpretation of “habitaciones.” The word *lodgings* certainly makes sense in conjunction with “tenant,” but again, Tarn strays too far from the meaning of the original. Felstiner finds a connection between “las habitaciones” of this canto and “la morada” found in Cantos VI and VII. He translates both as “dwellings.” Schmitt chooses “rooms,” preferring a straightforward and simple term, thus avoiding the addition of any unnecessary complexity.

Tarn’s “gobbled rations” perpetuate his creative, albeit erroneous, reading of this section. Felstiner’s phrase, “gulps of food,” while functional, comes up short in comparison to Schmitt’s simple, yet elegant, “rushed meals.” Tarn’s “hollow skin” is a fine rendering—even though “hueco” more accurately means hollow—since the idiomatic expression, “una persona vacía” means a “hollow person.” Both Felstiner and Schmitt translate it directly as “empty skin,” which transmits the same image without highlighting a specific aspect of the meaning. Tarn seems to have interpreted this entire section as a snapshot of urban life, with disenfranchised workers gobbling down their rations in run-down tenant housing. I admit this is an imaginative reading of this section that dovetails nicely with the speaker’s previous existential lamentations on modernity. We must realize, however, that this is Tarn’s interpretation that he then incorporates into his translation, resulting in an imposition

of his voice over Neruda's. Aesthetically, there is nothing wrong with Tarn's translation. It is innovative and vivacious; but, it is not Neruda.

The next three verses are as follows:

era algo, un pobre pétalo de cuerda exterminada:
un átomo del pecho que no vino al combate
o el áspero rocío que no cayó en la frente. (1:438)

rather: a trodden tendril of old rope,
the atom of a courage that gave way
or some harsh dew never distilled to sweat. (Tarn 23)

something it was, a spent petal of worn-out rope,
a shred of heart that fell short of struggle
or the harsh dew that never reached his face. (Felstiner 212)

rather a poor petal with its cord exterminated:
an atom from the breast that did not come to combat
or the harsh dew that did not fall on his brow. (Schmitt 33)

Tarn continues his creative rewriting of Neruda with "trodden tendril of old rope." While I can accept "old rope" for "cuerda exterminada," which seems more in line with Neruda's earthy tone than Schmitt's all too literal "cord exterminated," I cannot accept "trodden tendril" for "un pobre pétalo." Neruda is obviously combining an element of nature, "el pétalo," with that of a man-made material, "la cuerda." The juxtaposition of nature with modernity has been a prevalent theme throughout these first five cantos and if Tarn has not understood that by now, then he has overlooked one of the strongest undercurrents of the first half of the poem. Felstiner offers the best possible translation, "a spent petal of worn-out rope." Again, "a trodden tendril of old rope" is a beautiful poetic image, but Tarn removes the tension between man and nature that we

find in the original. While this minute change may be insignificant on its own, the sum total of these slight alterations over the course of the poem seriously compromises the overall integrity of the translation. With each creative rewriting, Tarn leads his reader further and further away from the original.

The second verse, “un átomo del pecho que no vino al combate,” challenges each of our translators. Tarn moves the idea of “combate” and folds it into the image of “un átomo del pecho,” creating “the atom of courage.” The last part of that phrase, “that gave way,” evokes a sense of surrender, submission, or even collapse. Tarn interprets the phrase literally, that of entering combat. While this is perfectly acceptable, the phrase “(no) venir al combate” has taken on a figurative meaning as well, that of “(not) coming to fight.” Felstiner gives us “a shred of heart that fell short of struggle.” He takes too many creative liberties and produces a phrase more along the lines of Tarn. He also seems to read the second half of the phrase more literally and not figuratively. Schmitt’s rendering, a word-for-word translation, leaves much to be desired: “an atom from the breast that did not come to combat.” In this case, Neruda’s surrealistic images elude our translators since neither one produces a commendable translation.

In the third and final verse of this section, all three translate “el áspero rocío” as “harsh dew.” The subordinate clause, “que no cayó en la frente,” in all its simplicity, elicits three distinct translations. Tarn gives

us a concrete interpretation with “never distilled to sweat.” Felstiner, finding “brow” too stuffy and “forehead” unpoetic, avoids translating “la frente” all together and gives us “that never reached his face.” Schmitt, as we have come to expect, renders an accurate, literal, but bland verse: “that did not fall on his brow.”

Finally, we read:

Era lo que no pudo renacer, un pedazo
de la pequeña muerte sin paz ni territorio:
un hueso, una campana que morían en él. (1:438)

This could not be reborn, a particle
of death without a requiem,
bare bone or fading church bell dying from within. (Tarn 23)

It was what could not be reborn, a bit
of petty death with no peace or place:
a bone, a bell, that were dying within him. (Felstiner 212)

It was what could not be revived, a bit
of the little death without peace or territory:
a bone, a bell that died within him. (Schmitt 33)

If we remove the ambiguous syntax, the hyperbaton, and strip away the succession of metaphors in the first seven verses of the canto, we are left with the following: “No eras tú, muerte grave [...] era algo [...]. Era lo que no pudo renacer.” Tarn translates this sequence as such: “It was not you, grave death [...] rather: [...]. This could not be reborn.” Obviously, Tarn has not understood the underlying structure of the stanza. Even though the lyrical self postpones meaning by pushing his thoughts into a self-perpetuating chain of metaphors, there is a central and stable syntax that provides a grammatical structure that

encompasses the complexities of these images. Felstiner translates it thus: “Solemn death it was not you [...] something it was [...]. It was what could not be reborn.” And, finally, Schmitt: “It was not you, solemn death [...] rather [...]. It was what could not be revived.” In following Neruda’s word order, Schmitt preserves the underlying sentence more closely than the others. A more accurate rendering, a composite of Felstiner and Schmitt, would be: “It was not you, solemn death, it was something. It was something that could not be reborn.” I would argue that the syntax of the first two complete sentences, verses 1–6 and 7–9, revolve around the axis of “algo.” Neruda never defines this “something” in the first six verses, only using the complex interweaving metaphors to allude to aspects of its meaning.

Now, let us see how each translates this “something” that death was not: “un pedazo / de la pequeña muerte sin paz ni territorio.” Tarn offers: “a particle / of death without requiem.” As we have come to expect, he imposes his own interpretation and alters the original significantly, taking “sin paz ni territorio” to mean “without requiem.” He also does away with the whole concept of “la pequeña muerte,” reducing it to just “death.” In Canto III it is “little death,” in Canto IV “la poderosa muerte” is “irresistible death,” and here it is simply “death.” This poses significant problems, since the tension between “la pequeña muerte” and “la poderosa muerte” is one of the central themes of *Alturas*. By not specifying whether this death is “pequeña” or “poderosa,” Tarn hinders

his reader's ability to notice both the structural and thematic tension between the two kinds of death. Felstiner, in contrast, offers a nice alliteration: "a bit / of petty death with no peace or place." And he consistently translates "la pequeña muerte" as "petty death" throughout his version. Felstiner translates "la poderosa muerte" of Canto IV as "the mightiest death." Schmitt, once again, offers an uncomplicated rendering: "a bit / of the little death without peace or territory." He also consistently translates "la pequeña muerte" as "the little death" throughout his translation. "La poderosa muerte," however, is "mighty death." Felstiner ruminates on the translatability of these terms and the tension they represent in the poem:

Canto IV opens with *La poderosa muerte*. Whether a "powerful," "mighty," "irresistible," or "overmastering" death, as translators have heard it,¹² it is in any case the "one death," which Canto III opposed to the "many deaths" that isolated men die day after day. By complex figures of speech [...] Neruda connects this *poderosa muerte* to other ideas in the poem. It is not simply that his writing runs to figures of speech, but that in those figures he evolves the deeper-than-narrative structure of his poem, particularly through words the translator has noticed and will come upon again. (164)

Apparently Tarn does not, or chooses not to, connect these words and ideas that come up throughout the poem. As we saw with "manantial," and now with the two kinds of death, Tarn's variations weaken the "cumulative effect" of Neruda's frequent repetition of these terms.

¹² Angel Flores, "Summits of Macchu Picchu," H. R. Hays, in *Twelve Spanish American Poets*; Nathaniel Tarn, *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*; and Ben Belitt, in *Selected Poems of Pablo Neruda*. (footnote included in Felstiner, *Translating* 264).

Finally, we have: “un hueso, una campana que morían en él.” Tarn adds poetic flourishes to the nouns, adding descriptive adjectives where there are none in the original: “bare bone or fading church bell dying from within.” Other than a slight variation in the verb, Felstiner and Schmitt offer identical translations: “a bone, a bell, that were dying within him” and “a bone, a bell that died within him.” Interestingly, Tarn drops the unidentified male figure, “él,” who is most likely “el pobre heredero” of the second verse.

Conclusion

By comparing and contrasting the translations of the first nine verses of Canto V, we can conclude that Tarn consistently alters the central imagery of Neruda’s vocabulary by embellishing, elevating, and occasionally eliding. It is doubtful that he appreciates the significance of repetition in the overarching message of *Alturas*. Moreover, his frequent misreadings of the syntax of this stanza, which is not that complex once you remove the hyperbaton, result in jumbled phrases that muddle the ambiguity of Neruda’s original. Other stylistic elements, such as diction, tone, and euphony, are also affected as a result. Nathaniel Tarn’s *Heights of Macchu Picchu* approximates Neruda’s breathtaking original, but as we have seen, it also deviates from it in terms of style and content. Neruda weaves a tapestry of ambiguous metaphors, displacing and postponing meaning through a twisting, meandering syntax that flows like the

Urubamba River below the slopes of Macchu Picchu. Simple telluric imagery, laden with ambiguity, permeates throughout these syntactic chains. Tarn simplifies the syntax, on one hand, and adorns and decorates the vocabulary on the other. He takes Neruda's multivalent metaphors and reduces them to concrete interpretations of his own creation. Thus, his rewriting concurrently waters down and erroneously intensifies Neruda's language, producing a misrepresentation of the original. While a greater understanding of the overall complexities of verse translation certainly helps us to appreciate the efforts of Tarn, we must realize that what we hear throughout the poem is Tarn's voice and not Neruda's. Felstiner, in reviewing the work of Ben Belitt, asked two rhetorical questions, which I also feel apply to Tarn: "Does Neruda come through essentially? Does the English alone ring true?" Echoing the words of Felstiner, I cannot always say yes. In light of the spectrum of translation quality I aspire to establish, Tarn's translation, while problematic in areas, does not constitute a considerable "failure." In fact, any deficiencies or stylistic errors found in *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* had no perceivable negative effect on the reception of Pablo Neruda in the United States in the late 1960s.

CHAPTER III

ERRORS OF INTERPRETATION IN *DOM CASMURRO*

In this chapter I analyze how Robert Scott-Buccluch's 1992 translation of *Dom Casmurro*, by Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, fails on an interpretive level by excising nine entire chapters, a move that undermines the overall metanarrative structure of the novel. I first offer a brief overview of the critical reception of Machado de Assis, generally, and of *Dom Casmurro*, specifically, in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century. Next, I discuss the extraliterary circumstances surrounding the reception of Scott-Buccluch's translation, relating one professor's reaction to his discovery of the inconsistencies between this particular translation and the original. Finally, as the heart of this chapter, I examine the chapters Scott-Buccluch eliminates. I analyze not only the story elements that are removed, but, most importantly, I demonstrate how the removal of these chapters weakens *Dom Casmurro* as an ironic, self-conscious, and reader-centered narrative. These nine chapters form an elliptical section that further strengthens and expands the recurring relationships between author, narrator, and reader, the excision of which fundamentally weakens and limits the metanarrative structure that permeates the novel. On the spectrum of problematic translations, Scott-Buccluch's translation of *Dom Casmurro* falls on one

extreme, that is, as an example of outright translation “failure,” a reality that has hindered the overall reception of Machado de Assis in English-speaking America and his importance to the emergent discipline of inter-American literature.

Dom Casmurro in English

As years pass, more and more critics—both within and without the field of Latin American literature—acknowledge and celebrate the genius of Machado de Assis. In a 1990 article in *The New Yorker*, Susan Sontag calls Machado “the greatest author ever produced in Latin America” (107). In that same year, she provided the introduction to a reprint of Grossman’s 1951 English translation of *As memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, published as *Epitaph of a Small Winner*. In *Genius*, Harold Bloom includes Machado, a mulato, among the one hundred exemplary creative minds in world literature, calling him “the supreme black literary artist to date” (674).¹ He praises the universal quality of Machado’s writing:

Machado de Assis is a kind of miracle, another demonstration of the autonomy of literary genius in regard to time and place, politics and religion, and all those other contextualizations that falsely are believed to overdetermine human gifts. (675)

González Echevarría calls Machado “the premier nineteenth-century Latin American writer and one of the best of all time,” also stating, “No one in Spanish [of that time period] comes close to his polish and originality” (“Introduction” 95). He considers Machado to be “the best

¹ Castro Rocha includes writers José Saramago, Carlos Fuentes, and John Barth as admirers of Machado (xxiv). See Saramago’s article in *The Author as Plagiarist*, Fuentes’s *Machado de la Mancha*, and Fitz’s “John Barth, Machado de Assis, and ‘The Literature of Exhaustion’: the Reception of Brazilian Literature in the United States During the ‘Boom’ Years.”

Latin American fiction writer” of the nineteenth century and insists, “he must be regarded as one of Latin America’s first world-class writers” (*Oxford Short Stories* 16). As a precursor to many of the narrative developments of Latin American and world literature in the twentieth century, Machado de Assis continues to defy categorization. Fitz suggests that Machado’s *oeuvre* “prove[s] that Machado de Assis deserves recognition not merely as Brazil’s first great narrator but as one of the true masters of modern narrative in the Western tradition (*Machado* 22). One may argue that Machado’s reception has been overwhelmingly positive, in spite of any perceived shortcomings in the various translations of his work. Nevertheless, it is Bloom’s opinion that, until recently, Machado has been translated inadequately:

This most refreshing of Brazilian novelists once was represented only by inadequate translations, an unhappy situation now fully remedied by Gregory Rabassa in his eloquent versions of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* (1997) and *Quincas Borba* (1998), and by John Gledson’s equally fine *Dom Casmurro* (1997). (675)

These recent, good translations of Machado emphasize the deficiencies of previous ones, specifically the Scott-Bucleuch translation of *Dom Casmurro*, which I consider a “failed” translation because it has skewed the perception of Machado’s work by editing it. Scott-Bucleuch excises chapters from *Dom Casmurro* with no explanation. The result is a translation that misconstrues, misinterprets, and misrepresents the original. Without these chapters the reader comes away with an incomplete understanding of Machado’s masterpiece. Building on

Daphne Patai's work, I argue that the failure of Scott-Buccleuch's translation resides in his misunderstanding of the underlying narrative structure of *Dom Casmurro*, particularly its metanarrative structure.

Scott-Buccleuch offers no indication where his translation is an abridgment and there is no explanatory note in the introduction indicating that chapters have been removed and reorganized. Scott-Buccleuch does, however, offer a brief note on the difficulties of translating *Dom Casmurro*, which may shed light on his reasoning for the excisions:

Ideally adapted to his theme, Machado de Assis's prose is concise, terse, almost epigrammatic in style. This is one of the features that most distinguishes his writing from that of his fellow novelists. [...] Such a terse style is not easy to convey in another language. [...] And finally there is Machado's style itself which, being concise, even in Portuguese, becomes, one must confess, virtually impossible to render satisfactorily in English. (8–9)

As we can see, Scott-Buccleuch repeatedly references Machado's style, describing it as "concise, terse, almost epigrammatic in style." After ruminating on the various differences between Portuguese and English, he then again returns to this prevailing theme, admitting the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of rendering Machado's style in English. Although we can only speculate as to why he removes some chapters and not others, Patai reasons that his "deletion of whole chapters suggests that his concern was directed [...] to what he considered an appropriate structure and rhythm in a novel" (99). Scott-Buccleuch apparently deemed superfluous the chapters in question and thus opted to remove

them, improving—in his mind, at least—the overall rhythm. Scott-Buccleuch’s abridgment, therefore, is an attempt to remove extraneous or distractive information in order to highlight the plot and propel it forward. Patai continues:

For what his excisions succeed in accomplishing is to sacrifice the narrative to the plot, which, Scott-Buccleuch seems to think, must proceed with as few impediments as possible. The pieces of Machado’s carefully fragmented narrative have, as a result, been neatly reassembled and locked into place by his translator. (99)

Patai’s comments serve as a point of departure, but her argument deserves closer attention in order to fully appreciate the impact this “failed” translation has on the reception of *Dom Casmurro* in inter-American studies. Which fragmented narrative elements has Scott-Buccleuch removed and how does their removal affect the overall plot of the work? How do these excisions destabilize the metafictional underpinnings of the narrative structure, especially the relationships between author, narrator, and reader? Of what information is the English reader deprived? Finally, how does this affect the reception and influence of Machado de Assis in inter-American letters, especially when we consider the existence of two excellent, albeit different, additional translations of *Dom Casmurro*?

The first English translation of *Dom Casmurro* was published in “London in 1953 by Helen Caldwell, the great Machadian scholar and translator, but did not appear in America until 1966” (Jackson

“Madness”).² Despite the capable Caldwell translation, Penguin Books sought a new translation in the early 1990s.³ Jackson accuses Scott-Bucleuch of “[butchering] the novel, omitting nine chapters and misnumbering the rest” (“Madness”). The chapters of the translation, therefore, do not line up with the numbering of the original. One potential danger, therefore, is that uninformed literature professors and their students who study the Scott-Bucleuch translation end up working with a badly distorted text. This particular translation fails to represent the innovations of the original, making it appear to be quite ordinary. This poses significant problems when studying *Dom Casmurro* both within the classroom and when performing research. In the late 1990s, however, Oxford included in the Library of Latin America series yet another translation of *Dom Casmurro* by John Gledson, which Jackson says, “comes to the rescue of both *Dom Casmurro* and Machado” (“Madness”). Critics of Brazilian literature avoid the Scott-Bucleuch translation in their studies and it would behoove the non-Portuguese reading inter-American critic to avoid it as well because of its organizational and interpretational flaws. Nevertheless, there is at least

² See also Jackson’s “Machado de Assis in English” for an annotated bibliography of works in English translation as well as an extensive list of critical works written in English about Machado (627–46).

³ Apparently Caldwell’s translation, although available in university libraries, went out of print a number of years before the Penguin version appeared. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain which version critics have read after 1992. The praise of Sontag and Bloom, for example, did not appear until the late 1990s, but in the case of Sontag she mainly focuses her praise on *Brás Cubas*.

one documented instance in which a professor confronted the textual limitations of the Scott-Buccleuch translation in his classroom.

Zulfikar Ghose, Pakistani-American writer, poet, and professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin, regularly has the students in his creative writing seminars read Machado. It was during one of these seminars when he and his students discovered the incongruities in Scott-Buccleuch's translation. He states the following:

Penguin Books included in its prestigious Penguin Classics series a translation of *Dom Casmurro* which has become notorious, for its translator cut out several chapters from it and with a carpenter's tongue-and-groove sleight of hand so bridged the gap that the novel appeared unabridged. The book remained in print for some years when it should have been withdrawn after Penguin were alerted of their translator's deception. (Ghose)

There is, however, more to the story. According to Brazilian writer and journalist Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna, Ghose was most likely the first to discover the discrepancy. Sant'Anna, a colleague of Ghose's at the time, relates the story in an article he wrote for *Globo*:

Zulf dá seminários de criação literária na Universidade do Texas, Austin, para estudantes que querem ser escritores. E sempre os faz ler, em inglês, seja *Dom Casmurro* ou *Brás Cubas*. Acontece que estava dando um desses seminários quando, ao referir-se a capítulos de *Dom Casmurro*, descobriu que na edição americana-inglesa feita pela Penguin Classics Edition faltavam nove capítulos. E o que é mais grave: o tradutor parece ter feito de propósito esse corte, pois, além de cortar, fundiu alguns trechos. ("Atentado contra Machado" 2)

We can only imagine the perplexity of both student and teacher when they first discover that the chapter divisions of translation are not

faithful to the original only to realize that the translator simply removed said chapters. Apparently, after he noticed “a mutilação do texto machadiano,” Ghose wrote a strongly worded letter to Penguin notifying them of the error. As an academic and a writer involved in the inter-American project, Ghose recognized the potentially disastrous consequences of the Scott-Bucleuch translation. Sant’Anna includes a translation of Ghose’s original letter to Penguin in his article:

Quero informar-lhes que na tradução de Robert Scott-Bucleuch feita do português, de *Dom Casmurro*, de Machado de Assis, faltam nove capítulos. Não há qualquer informação em qualquer lugar da edição de que esta é uma edição abreviada, que pudesse indicar ao leitor da tradução inglesa que partes do original foram omitidas; do modo como o corte foi feito parece claro que o tradutor o fez deliberadamente.

Here, Ghose defines the issue, suggesting that Scott-Bucleuch made the cuts on purpose. Moreover, without any indication of this abridgement, the reader is unaware of any changes to the original text, a reality that seriously compromises the process of reception and influence. As we will soon see, the removal of these chapters severely compromises the integrity of the metanarrative structure of the novel. Ghose relates how he discovered the discrepancy:

Encomendei o livro para um seminário de pós-graduação. O exemplar do romance que tenho é uma tradução de Helen Cadwell publicado há 30 anos pela University of California Press, a qual foi ignorada pela sua edição. No entanto, estava eu usando meu exemplar no seminário e aconteceu citar um capítulo. Os estudantes olharam para mim estupefatos. Descobrimos que o capítulo que estava citando não existe na edição da Penguin. Peguei o exemplar de um estudante e foi

surpreendente ver que enquanto o original contém 148 capítulos, na sua edição há apenas 139.

Ghose's experience with his students is a practical and not merely a theoretical or hypothetical example of the misleading impact of a "failed" translation. If Ghose had not been familiar with the Caldwell translation, the class would have never known that the English translation they were studying was deeply flawed. Perhaps one of those students would have gone on to cite this particular translation in a publication, thus perpetuating not only the translation error but scholarship done on the basis of that error. Ghose continues his letter, describing in detail, the structural changes Scott-Buccluch made to the chapters:

Fiz uma detalhada comparação entre as duas traduções e com o original em português. Ficou patente para mim que a versão de seu tradutor é uma chocante má interpretação do romance de Machado. Seu tradutor tirou o capítulo LII e usou o mesmo número do capítulo para o capítulo seguinte. O que é o capítulo LIV no original virou capítulo LIII na sua versão, mas para fazer uma transição ele pegou algumas frases da abertura do capítulo LIV e matreiramente pulou o resto, chegando a pular todo o capítulo LV. Então um bloco de quatro capítulos, do LVII ao LX, foi cortado. Tendo dado esse grande salto, para fazer a transição, seu tradutor viu-se obrigado a traduzir erradamente a abertura do capítulo LXI (o qual virou capítulo LIV). A seguir tirou também os capítulos LXII e LXIV.

It is not difficult to compare Scott-Buccluch's "shockingly bad translation" with the original and see the structural changes made to the chapters. What is missing in Ghose's letter, however, is any reference to the *content* that is lost. Obviously the reader is missing out on something, but Ghose does not explain what exactly it is. Scott-

Buccleuch does not simply remove superfluous information; he disrupts and destabilizes the intertwining metafictional connections between the author, narrator, and reader, a point Ghose does not mention in his letter to the Penguin editors. Nevertheless, Ghose demonstrates how “failed” translations reflect poorly on the translator, the publisher, and most importantly the author of the original work. In Ghose’s estimation, the only way to correct this gross negligence is a complete recall of the translation. In spite of his straightforward letter, according to the article, Penguin never responded. In an email exchange several months later with Sant’Anna, Ghose makes the following comment that speaks volumes about the general reception of Brazilian letters by European and American readers and critics:

Imagine a gritaria que ocorreria se uma fraude semelhante tivesse ocorrido com um autor alemão ou francês da dimensão de Machado? Estou seriamente achando que americanos e europeus não estão interessados em literatura brasileira e que não faz diferença quando uma obra-prima brasileira aparece como algo sem sentido. (2)

Ghose recognizes that even at the end of the twentieth century many in the literary establishment continue to maintain an uninformed, apathetic, or even disdainful attitude toward Brazilian letters. The case of Scott-Buccleuch’s “failed” translation of *Dom Casmurro*, therefore, serves as a representative example of the larger issue of the reception and influence of Brazilian literature in the English-speaking world.

Ghose’s letter exemplifies specific aspects of the concept of the “failed” translation we have discussed so far. First and foremost, the

uninformed reader has no idea that the translation is unfaithful to the original. As Ghose relates, his students were dumbfounded when they discovered that the translation of a reputable press was incomplete and abridged. With no note of explanation, the chapters were simply gone. Second, as a result of the excision of chapters and consequent abridgement, Scott-Buccleuch, in an attempt to improve upon the original, ultimately makes it worse. Ironically, he ends up, as Gregory Rabassa has often said, making a sow's ear out of a silk purse ("The Silk Purse Business"). Finally, Ghose's letter alludes to the notion that the publisher, as well as the translator, affects the reception of a given work. The consequences of a "failed" translation are much broader and more nuanced than one might initially think. Not only do they have an effect at the level of the reader, they can potentially influence every aspect of the literary establishment, affecting critics, professors, researchers, and students, as well as the general reading public. For whatever reason, this misrepresentative translation slipped through the cracks of quality control at Penguin. Ultimately, the key problem with "failed" translations is that the reader who does not know the original has no way to gauge the quality and reliability of a translation, and a bad translation damages the author's reputation. The "failed" translation distorts the original in such a way, and to such an extent, that the reader is offered a text that misinforms, misconstrues, and misguides. Although it may be impossible to quantify the extent to which the Scott-Buccleuch translation has

hindered Machado's influence, the fact remains that one can still find the Penguin edition in university libraries throughout the world. Unsuspecting students and scholars are reading it and relying on it. The nonspecialist may inadvertently read it, instead of one of the two superior translations, by Caldwell and Gledson, and come to make critical, perhaps even scholarly, judgments on it.

Destabilizing the Metanarrative Structure

In "Machado in English," Daphne Patai dedicates about a quarter of her argument to Scott-Bucleuch's defective translation of *Dom Casmurro*. She recognizes that the translator "has eliminated much of the metanarrative that is absolutely crucial to understanding [Dom Casmurro]⁴ and his task in composing the story we ostensibly have before us" (97). Before we analyze the excised chapters, therefore, we must discuss the nature of the metanarrative of the novel that is weakened by the abridgement. Marta Peixoto states, apropos this point:

⁴ Critics vary in how they refer to the narrator-protagonist of *Dom Casmurro*. While there are three names used for the three stages of his life—Bentinho, the boy and young man; Bento Santiago, the adult; and Dom Casmurro, the old man who is the irascible author of the text—I will refer to the narrator as Dom Casmurro throughout my study in order to maintain consistency and avoid confusion. I have edited the citations of other critics to follow suit. Moreover, it is imperative to keep in mind the characteristics of these three stages of the narrator, which Peixoto describes: "First, we have the timid and enamored youth, persuaded that the world revolves around him. Bento's second guise is darker, authoritarian, and impulsive and gets ever more somber as the novel progresses. [...] When Bento takes on his third guise as Dom Casmurro and our narrator, he regains some of the mildness of his youthful self: as narrator he is genial, nostalgic, engaging, appealing directly to readers of various kinds, taking us nonchalantly on seemingly unrelated digressions that only after further readings of the novel may reveal their second intentions" (226). Although there are three guises to the narrator, we must remember that Dom Casmurro creates these self-reflections in his later years as part of his narrative, which is a retrospective look on his life.

The key to interpreting *Dom Casmurro* lies with the narrator-protagonist and with our view of his designs and possible covert purposes. [Dom Casmurro] discusses the process of writing on almost every page, indulging in the famous seemingly casual digressions that mark the novel's style and that only a careful reading reveals to be pertinent (in most cases) to the main narrative. (219).

How the narrator-protagonist Dom Casmurro tells the story, therefore, is more important than the story he actually recounts. João Adolfo Hansen observes, “the decisions about the narration are more fundamental than the events of the story itself, because they call readers’ attention to the act of the invention of the text itself” (“Fruit and the Rind” 248). The story of perceived adultery is not nearly as important as the way in which the narrator constantly destabilizes his own argument by introducing digressions, contradictions, and subversions that underscore his unreliable nature. Peixoto continues:

It seems impossible to disagree with the current prevailing critical opinion that the novel offers an exceedingly well-crafted example of a first-person narrator who, while placing the blame for grave misdeeds on other characters, ends up incriminating himself. Most current readers agree that the novel does not leave open the question of adultery for readers to decide as they see fit but rather blocks the possibility of a final decision of moral judgment. (220)⁵

⁵ Paul Dixon points out that reading the indeterminacy of the issue of adultery has been largely characteristic of North American critics, including Waldo Frank, Keith Ellis, Arthur Brackel, Earl Fitz, as well as himself (“*Dom Casmurro e o leitor*” 217). Celebrated Brazilian critics, such as José Veríssimo, Lúcia Miguel Pereira, Barreto Filho, Afrânio Coutinho and Érico Veríssimo tended to side with the perspective of Dom Casmurro, that is, condemning the supposed infidelity of Capitu (218). With the publication of Helen Caldwell’s seminal study, *The Brazilian Othello of Machado de Assis*, in 1960—and the subsequent critical reception and response by Silviano Santiago in 1969 (“A Retórica da Verossimilhança”), and Roberto Schwarz in 1991 (*Um Mestre na Periferia do Capitalismo*)—Capitu’s image of innocence gained a stronger foothold in Brazilian literary criticism. Notwithstanding, Brazilian critics were inclined to favor those readings that examined the themes of race and gender, as well as the culture, history, and economics of nineteenth-century Brazilian society in Rio de Janeiro over

Contemporary readings of *Dom Casmurro* have a tendency to downplay the question of Capitu's infidelity, choosing to highlight, instead, Machado de Assis's innovative narrative and metafictional techniques, especially in regards to the relationship between author, narrator, and reader. Santiago was one of the first Brazilian critics to examine the deeper narrative structure at play and Machado's aim in creating a new kind of narrator:

[Machado de Assis] deseja que [*Dom Casmurro*] se torne mais ambíguo, mais sutil, e para isso suprime o narrador onisciente e que explicava os fatos de uma plataforma divina, e dá toda a responsabilidade da narração ao personagem ciumento. (35)

Santiago calls this narrative technique “a retórica da verossimilhança,” in which the narrator employs language and rhetorical devices to manipulate and persuade the reader to accept Capitu's guilt and Dom Casmurro's innocence as the *only* plausible situation. One of the defining characteristics of this rhetorical stance, according to Santiago, is “o predomínio da *imaginação* sobre a *memória* na investigação do passado” (emphasis in the original, 37). This relationship between imagination and memory, as we will see, becomes a prominent theme in the elliptical section Scott-Buccleuch excises in his translation. Santiago's landmark essay, as well as Caldwell's book, laid the foundation for future critical approaches that focused more on the internal narrative relationship

narratological, reception, and reader-response studies (218). See also Dixon's “Machado de Assis, the ‘Defunto Autor,’ and the Death of the Author” (53–54) and Abel Barros Baptista's study, “O Legado Caldwell, ou o Paradigma do Pé Atrás” (161–62) for further information on the differences and similarities between the critical reception of Machado in the United States and Brazil.

between the narrator and reader. In fact, much of Paul Dixon's critical work on Machado de Assis, and specifically *Dom Casmurro*, focuses on these narratological issues:

With its first-person pseudo-author and its ambiguous story involving the question of faithfulness, betrayal, and paternal attribution, *Dom Casmurro* has created for itself the ideal metaphorical territory for exploring the relationship between authors, works, and readers. The novel poses the question of whether an author's intention can be read or whether considerations of intention are relevant. (*Retired Dreams* 90)

Whereas most contemporary criticism underlines the importance of the active role of the reader, Dixon offers a detailed analysis of the multiplicity of internal and external readers in the appropriately titled, "*Dom Casmurro e o leitor*." Dixon points out that the reader is mentioned no less than 28 times throughout the text (211). J. Mattoso Câmara Jr. also analyzes the register of the narrator when speaking to his readers: "São ao todo dezenove passos em que o leitor é assim sistematicamente tratado por *tu*, numa intimidade afetuosa mesmo quando levemente zombeteira" (71). Dixon also clarifies that the "leitor" to whom Dom Casmurro refers in the text is actually the narratee of the novel, and not simply an implied reader.⁶ In fact, Dom Casmurro, as narrator, refers to a masculine and a feminine reader—"o leitor" and "a leitora." Although Dom Casmurro, as the first-person, homodiegetic narrator, does not

⁶ The International Society for the Study of Narrative defines "narratee" as such: "Often conflated with the implied reader—although a fictionalized or rhetorically distinct narratee, different from the implied reader, may be an explicit receiver addressed by the narrator, with a personality, ideological assumptions, etc., distinct from those of the implied reader. The narratee is separate from the reader, providing the narrator with someone to narrate to whom many times responds to and interacts with the narrator. Some narratees are fleshed out as full-fledged fictional characters, part of the fiction, and in some works they may also take turns as fictional narrators" ("Narratee," n.pag.).

interact with these narratees as characters, he does direct his comments in such a way that, based on assumptions he makes regarding their gender, he anticipates their potential reactions to his text. Dixon examines the textual clues that offer an idea of the characteristics of these two readers:

Em geral, podemos dizer que o narratário masculino é um leitor mais cuidadoso, objetivo e voltado para as qualidades literárias do texto como o estilo e a caracterização. Goza de mais confiança do narrador. A narratária tem uma relação ironicamente contrária à narrador. Em geral, ela é mais convencional, subjetiva e superficial. Mas afinal, tal caracterização dos imaginados leitores de *Dom Casmurro* não deixa de ser uma caracterização do narrador. O fato de que ele desconfia da narratária não é de causar surpresa, em vista de suas atitudes desconfiadas quanto à esposa. (213)

Therefore, we must not conflate the identity of the “leitor” and “leitora” with that of ourselves as readers. Even though Dom Casmurro makes specific and direct comments to his narratees, we can also read across the grain of the text and see that Machado de Assis, as the author, speaks to us, as readers, through his narrator. We must keep in mind, however, that when Dom Casmurro speaks to his reader, he is speaking principally to his narratees “o leitor” and “a leitora” but this textual stance also opens up the possibility that he is also speaking to the external reader. As we continue to analyze the increasingly complex relationships between author, narrator, narratee, and reader, we will see how the text lends itself to a reading in which Machado de Assis, as the author, inserts his own voice through the words of Dom Casmurro, the narrator. Scott-Buccluch’s textual cuts remove many of the

metafictional innovations from the text, thus limiting the depth and quality of a narratological study of the novel.

Through his subtle, yet calculated, digressions, Dom Casmurro seduces and persuades his reader to accept his point of view as the only correct version of events. Guimarães speaks to the issue of the narrator's persuasive tactics and how he inadvertently subverts his own arguments:

Ao mesmo tempo em que o narrador procura convencer-nos da sua versão do ocorrido, ele vai deixando pelo caminho falsas pistas que possibilitam explicações divergentes das suas, contituindo-se em iscas para enredar o leitor no campo ficcional. [...O] leitor é colocado no centro da arena de discussão, já que persuadir é um dos principais interesses da prosa de *Dom Casmurro*. (215)

Even though “the narrator wants to persuade the reader that he is telling the truth,” as Hansen observes, “the fact that his memory is bad places limits on the way he represents himself” (248). In spite of any perceived lapses in his memory, Dom Casmurro initially presents himself as a highly amenable and, at least on the surface, reliable narrator. According to Richard Graham, Machado creates a “defective narrator whom the reader wants to believe despite evidence of his untrustworthiness and selective memory” (ix). Although Dom Casmurro resorts to a persuasive rhetorical stance, the way in which he presents his memories ultimately causes the reader to suspect his intentions. Fitz agrees with these estimations while pointing out the central theme of the novel:

Dom Casmurro returns once again to the use of a keenly self-conscious narrator-protagonist, whose powerful but not

immediately apparent bias in regard to his telling of the story gradually emerges as the novel's great clandestine theme. (*Machado* 53)

Being able to follow the numerous digressions and deciphering their significance to the overall structure, therefore, is indispensable to a reliable interpretation of the novel. Simplifying, or removing these chapters, as is the case with the Scott-Buccluch translation, guts the novel's originality.

In addition to interpreting the numerous textual clues of the narrator's unreliability, the reader should also seek "to understand Machado's intention as an author, despite the deliberate obfuscation he [introduces] through the first-person narrator whom we want to trust but have reason to doubt" (Graham x). This authorial intent, coupled with the narrator's intent, creates a textual web that the reader is invited to untangle in order to extrapolate meaning. Graham speaks of the reader's participation in the construction of meaning:

Although Machado allows the reader choice, not telling us whether or not to believe the narrator (was his wife faithful or not?), by the same token we are given the freedom to examine things more pensively or not, depending on our inclination, and Machado would have preferred us to read with questioning attention. In this, his intention is clear. (x)

Certainly, readers will draw different conclusions—as evidenced in the numerous critical responses to *Dom Casmurro*—but Scott-Buccluch handicaps the reader by removing key sections, and, thus, weakening the overall metatextual structure. Consequently, the reader is left with a misrepresentative text, which diminishes her ability to scrutinize the

text. Whereas Machado presents the reader with a choice of “[examining] things more pensively or not,” Scott-Buccleuch robs the reader of this choice. Moreover, this affects the reader’s general perception of Machado as a writer and of the quality of *Dom Casmurro* as a work of Brazilian literature. It is this altered perception that damages the overall reception of Machado de Assis in the inter-American project because the nonspecialist reader comes away with a negative opinion of what is by acclaim one of the great Brazilian novels.

As the book opens, the narrator-protagonist introduces himself as the internal author of the text. Dom Casmurro is “a comfortably retired old gentleman who lives on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro at the turn of the century” (Peixoto 21). His current home is an exact replica of the one in which he grew up: “Um dia, há bastante anos,” he says, “lembrou-me reproduzir no Engenho Novo a casa em que me criei na antiga Rua de Matacavalos, dando-lhe o mesmo aspecto e economia daquela outra, que desapareceu” (14). He goes on to explain his objective in reconstructing the home of his childhood:

O meu fim evidente era atar as duas pontas da vida, e restaurar na velhice a adolescência. Pois, senhor, não consegui recompor o que foi nem o que fui. Em tudo, se o rosto é igual, a fisionomia é diferente. Se só me faltassem os outros, vá; um homem consola-se mais ou menos das pessoas que perde; mas falta eu mesmo, e esta lacuna é tudo. (14)

Dom Casmurro’s stated purpose is to connect the happiest moments of his life—his childhood—with his old age. In this way he can fill in the

mysterious void of the middle years of his life. This profound incoherence between these two time periods, as Rex Nielsen argues, shows that at some point there occurred “uma ruptura [de] sua identidade” (30). This rupture points to the “lacuna” Dom Casmurro mentions, which is the source of his restiveness and anxiety as his life comes to a close. He recognizes, however, the futility of this endeavor since recreating the physical surroundings, “o rosto,” does not reproduce the internal feelings of happiness and joy, “a fisionomia.” When he says “falto eu mesmo,” he refers to “what should have been the best, most fruitful and loving years of his life” (Fitz, *Machado* 54). Instead, he allowed himself “to become a cruel, implacable monster, a man whose warm, loving nature had been overwhelmed by his cold, uncaring, and selfish side, which is fueled by fear, feelings of inadequacy, and jealousy” (54). Initially, Dom Casmurro attempts to reconstruct, and perhaps redeem, his past by physically reconstructing the house of his youth, but this attempt reflects his inability to restore the emotions associated with that time period. When this physical and architectural reconstruction fails to bring Dom Casmurro the solace he seeks, he turns to the power of self-writing, as Nielsen states:

É após essa tentativa frustrada que ele se lança a outra tentativa mais eficiente: a narração. Sua narração é a busca da coerência, da lógica, da seqüência e da contigüidade. Assim, sua narração pretende recuperar não a semelhança exterior mas a imagem interior. Como afirma John Gledson, “*Dom Casmurro* is narrated ‘from the inside.’” É preciso ressaltar que essa narração interior é um processo de construção que tem o mesmo objetivo de reproduzir a velha

casa no Engenho Novo, ou seja, restabelecer uma identidade perdida. (31–32)

The reconstruction of his past through the narration of his memories, coupled with the actual physical reconstruction of the house of his youth, reflects Dom Casmurro's yearning to recover something that was lost. Hansen reminds that in spite of the physical reconstruction of the house, "literature exists in the mind, for everything happens in [the narrator's head]; [...] the narrator is the whole of the book" (247). He continues: "When he defines his self as a 'lacuna,' the narrator suggests that the very substance of what he writes is the time which has disappeared from his memory. He narrates, but does not remember" (248). Santiago argues that Dom Casmurro's act of writing is not an exercise of self-exploration, as the narrator would have his readers believe; rather, his narration is calculated and premeditated:

[A] reconstituição do passado obedece a um plano predeterminado [...] e sobretudo a um arranjo convincente e intelectual da sua vida. Frisemos os dois últimos adjetivos: convincente, porque pretende persuadir alguém, o leitor, de alguma coisa; intelectual, porque depende da reflexão constante do narrador, e não trai um desejo de se deixar invadir passivamente pelo passado, por impressões fugidias e passageiras, delicadas. (38)

The psychological reconstruction of Dom Casmurro's past through the act of self-writing is an attempt to recover his memory and make sense of his life. Due to the numerous digressions, fissures, contradictions, and gaps, however, the reader begins to suspect Dom Casmurro of ulterior motives in his writing. Fitz suggests that the unstated purpose of Dom

Casmurro's narration is "to expiate the guilt that gnaws at him but that he cannot—or will not—openly acknowledge" (53).

But what did Dom Casmurro do that would cause such pain and anguish and this fragmentary rupture in his life? What memories reside in the metaphorical "lacuna" that exists between his childhood and old age—an image to which Dom Casmurro returns again and again throughout the novel? Fitz summarizes the key events that lead to Dom Casmurro's miserable and pathetic existence:

He believes, at least on one level of his conscious mind, that he was the victim of an adulterous affair between his strong-willed wife, the enigmatic Capitu, and his best friend, Escobar. His response to what he thinks is his discovery of this infidelity is to applaud the death of his erstwhile friend, to drive his wife and child into foreign exile, and finally to wish that the child (whose biologic father he believes he is not) die of leprosy. (*Machado* 53)

On one hand, Dom Casmurro seeks catharsis through the act of writing and he hopes to relieve the guilt he feels from driving away his wife, son, and best friend. On the other hand, as Helen Caldwell argues in *The Brazilian Othello*, Dom Casmurro seeks to justify his cruel and implacable actions by proving Capitu's guilt to his reader. A lawyer by profession, Dom Casmurro presents his case (the events of his life he chooses to mention) to the jury (the readers of his narration) and, always leading them to accept his version of what happened in his life, he awaits their verdict on the innocence or guilt of Capitu (70–72). At the end of the novel, when Dom Casmurro tells the reader, "tu concordarás comigo," Caldwell argues that, "the reader realizes with a start that he has been

pressed into jury duty. [Dom Casmurro's] 'narrative' has been a long defense in his own behalf" (71).⁷ Nevertheless, Dom Casmurro, the cantankerous old man ruined by his own egocentrism, distrust, jealousy, and fear, presents the reader with his "truthful" account, which is full of elisions, lacunae, and fissures. Fitz writes:

Just as *Dom Casmurro* is at one and the same moment both Dom Casmurro's act of truth telling and his act of lying, so too is it a text that both "constructs itself" [...] and that "deconstructs itself." (*Machado* 54)⁸

Dom Casmurro, in his attempts to join together the two ends of his life, effectively undermines his own argument, which only becomes apparent when the reader analyzes the self-reflexivity interwoven throughout the novel. By removing these important chapters from his translation, Scott-Bucleuch undermines the reader's ability to unweave Dom Casmurro's intricate narrative web. In the remainder of this chapter, we will see exactly what information the reader misses from this particular translation, and how that affects his ability to participate with the

⁷ In his 2005 MLA presentation, "Living a Lie: The Silence of Truth in *Dom Casmurro*," Scott Infanger argues that Caldwell's lawyer/narrator and jury/reader parallel breaks down upon closer scrutiny: "In this, Caldwell herself functions as an inquisitorial judge, but the reader cannot act as a juror, for the Brazilian legal system only requires a jury trial for homicide. It is only the role of the inquisitorial judge presiding over a trial that the reader can consider the evidence both inside and 'outside the book'" (9–10). In Infanger's estimation, Caldwell is guilty of imposing her own cultural misreading on the text, therefore destabilizing her own argument, one which has been perpetuated in critical and academic circles for decades.

⁸ Fitz further develops the theoretical underpinnings of the construction and deconstruction of the text: "Indeed, *Dom Casmurro* epitomizes what Derrida, Culler, Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, and others consider to be the essential feature of deconstructive criticism, that a text necessarily undercuts itself, that because of the unstable, arbitrary, and mutually creative relationship between signifier and signified a text is inescapably in the process of 'deconstructing itself' at the same time that thematically, structurally, and every other way it is trying to 'construct' itself into an organically cohesive artistic whole" (*Machado* 54–55).

narrator and the author in the act of ascribing meaning to the text. In short, Scott-Buccleuch's translation simplifies *Dom Casmurro* and transforms it into a banal and boring tale of alleged adultery.

About halfway through the novel, as Bentinho heads off to the seminary, Scott-Buccleuch begins his textual surgery, first removing chapter 52, "O Velho Pádua," in which Capitu's father bids farewell to Bentinho. This chapter holds a significant place when analyzing the relationship between the respective families of Bentinho and Capitu. Those critics that explore the socio-economic dynamic between the wealthy Santiago family and the poor Páduas, examine this chapter as part of an underlying theme of social ascension. The removal of this chapter destabilizes the argument that Capitu's family saw her potential betrothal to Bentinho as a way out of their financial misfortune. Pádua's negative opinion of José Dias is also important when we look at the level of influence the "agregado" has on both Bentinho and his mother. Nevertheless, this chapter does not contain significant metafictional elements that influence the textual relationship between narrator, narratee, and reader.

Patai posits that Scott-Buccleuch "seems to have grave doubts about this entire elliptical but essential middle section of the novel" (97). She continues the description of the chapters removed:

Chapter 54, "Panegírico de Santa Mônica," he retitles "Escobar." He then treats as a superfluous digression everything after that chapter's first two lines, to which he joins chapter 56's second paragraph, introducing Escobar:

“Eis aqui outro seminarista. Chamava-se Ezequiel de Sousa Escobar.” (83)

What he removes are two chapters, chapter 54, “Panegírico de Santa Mônica” and chapter 55, “Um Soneto,” that contain episodes that link back to the theme of connecting childhood to old age, which are critical to the metanarrative. He also eliminates his reader’s ability to link Dom Casmurro’s life and narrative to the life of Santa Mônica, a subtle if telling example of intertextual play.

In chapter 54, Dom Casmurro recalls running into a friend from the seminary a few years earlier. He asks about the *Panegírico* his friend had written while they studied together. Later, the friend stops by Dom Casmurro’s home and insists on giving him the second-to-last copy of the original, which Dom Casmurro accepts out of courtesy but he is mostly uninterested. Although this brief episode, on the surface, seems “superfluous,” we see that the narrator-protagonist is searching for ways to connect with the memories of his youth: “Como isto me faz remontar os anos da mocidade!” (83). While the unnamed author of the *Panegírico* is interested in determining Dom Casmurro’s reaction to the work, the narrator expropriates the text for his own interests, as Dixon states:

The theme of an author’s pride in his creation, and his possessiveness of that creation, is an important one in the novel. But concomitantly, the theme of the reader’s expropriation of another author’s work is also important. (*Retired Dreams* 90)

This interaction, therefore, calls into question the ownership of the text.

Is it the author who determines the value and ultimate interpretation of

the text, or is it the reader who receives it? Just as Dom Casmurro appropriates the *Panegírico* for his own narrative purposes, throughout he invites his readers to do the same with his own narration.

Helen Caldwell views this chapter as one of the most important when dealing with the concept of authorial intent (150). Throughout her study, she demonstrates that Dom Casmurro goes to great lengths to name every character in his narrative, no matter how important or insignificant. She states the following about one character whose name Dom Casmurro purposefully omits:

But there is one person of some prominence whose name [Dom Casmurro] deliberately withholds, and makes such a to-do about not giving his name that one's curiosity is aroused. I refer to the anonymous author of the *Panegyric of Saint Monica*. Why this "lacuna?" And why is the nameless man and his panegyric introduced into the story at all? Is this episode a digression? Why would Machado de Assis, one of the most economical of writers, permit a digression in this, his masterpiece, which is also a masterpiece of economy? Because, it would seem, he could not help himself, in view of the method he had adopted for the construction of this novel. (150-51)

Caldwell argues that this apparent digression or omission must be noteworthy since Machado de Assis, a master of the economy of language, abjures extraneous information. Every phrase, every paragraph, and every chapter counts. She continues:

With the insulting omission of the name, and the subsequent sarcastic portrayal of its bearer and his pitiful opus, [Dom Casmurro] turns on his maker: the anonymous author, I believe, is none other than Machado de Assis himself. At first glance the idea may seem far-fetched, not to say preposterous. (153)

Caldwell argues that the unnamed author of the panegyric is the author himself, Machado de Assis (153). She goes on to analyze three key aspects of this episode: “[Dom Casmurro’s] pompous condescension, the superficial resemblances between Machado and the panegyrist, and the subject of the panegyric—Saint Monica” (153). Her analysis gives us cause to consider the relationship between author and narrator. Whereas Dom Casmurro repeatedly asserts his authorship of the text, we, as readers, know that Machado de Assis is the true author. Caldwell adroitly points out this reality: “The episode of the panegyric, then, is a ‘pair of spectacles’ which Machado de Assis sets on the reader’s nose, so that he may see that [Dom Casmurro] is not the real author of the book—and may see who is” (158). Caldwell’s reading encourages us to look deeper at the relationships between Machado de Assis, the author of *Dom Casmurro*, and the narrator-protagonist who claims authorship of the text we are reading.

These metanarrative techniques are much more apparent, and decisive, in chapter 55, “Um Soneto.” Dom Casmurro remembers a sonnet he started yet never finished while in the seminary. He decides to dedicate an entire chapter to analyzing his unfinished sonnet, which serves as one of the many examples of self-reflexivity and self-critique found throughout the novel. The sonnet is made up of two verses: the first, “Oh! flor do céu! oh! flor cândida e pura!; and the last, “Perde-se a vida, ganha-se a batalha!” What interests us is the fact that, in a

metaphorical replay of chapter 2, we have a beginning and an end, but no middle. The image of the “flor” represents life, while the last verse mentions the end of life. Dom Casmurro elaborates on his frustration in failing to write the rest of the sonnet:

Pois, senhores, nada me consola daquele soneto que não fiz. Mas, como eu creio que os sonetos existem feitos, como as odes e os dramas, e as demais obras de arte, por uma razão de ordem metafísica, dou esses dois versos ao primeiro desocupado que os quiser. Ao domingo, ou se estiver chovendo, ou na roça, em qualquer ocasião de lazer, pode tentar ver se o soneto sai. Tudo é dar-lhe uma idéia e encher o centro que falta. (86)

Here, Dom Casmurro invites the reader to write the missing verses, to fill in the gap between the beginning and the end, that is, to add the interpretation that any good modern narrative requires. Just as the narrator-protagonist invites the reader to participate in artistic creation, Machado de Assis invites us as readers to fill in silences of Dom Casmurro’s mysterious middle years. Without these two chapters, the relationship between the narrator-protagonist and the reader are seriously compromised. Is this the only section in which this relationship of co-creators is exhibited? Certainly not, but Scott-Buccluch’s translation robs the reader of the chance to decide what information is essential or extraneous to the plot and to the metanarrative and badly damages what is most exemplary in the novel.

The Penguin edition also cuts out the first paragraph of chapter 56, “Um Seminarista,” and joins it to the first paragraph of “Panegírico de Santa Mônica.” In the removed paragraph, Dom Casmurro continues to

flip through the *Panegírico* left by his friend. These “páginas amarelas” elicit other memories, “o calor da juventude nascente, o calor do passado, o meu próprio calor” (86). The rest of the chapter introduces the character Escobar. Again, we see the narrator’s attempt to reclaim the memories of his youth. After this newly reconstructed chapter, Scott-Buccluch removes chapters 57–60. He includes “A Vaca de Homero” and “Uma Ponta de Iago” but then cuts out chapters 63 and 64, “Metades de um sonho” and “Uma idéia e um Escrúpulo.” The plot moves quite nicely without these chapters, as Patai points out, but we lose the metanarrative structure (96). These particular chapters are fundamental in establishing the relationship between author, narrator, and reader in mutually constructing textual meaning. Those that read the Scott-Buccluch translation miss much of the virtuosity of Machado’s metanarrative strategy and come away from it feeling that *Dom Casmurro* is a thematically boring and technically ordinary text, the result of which is to view Machado de Assis as a “boring” and “technically ordinary” writer, when he is neither.

In chapter 57, “De Preparação,” the narrator slips into a self-reflective and self-critical aside that further establishes the relationship between him and his reader. Upon reflecting on the *Panegírico*, other “sensações passadas” come to him. Dom Casmurro writes:

Uma dessas, e das primeiras, quisera contá-la aqui em latim. Não é que a matéria não ache termos honestos em nossa língua, que é casta para os castos, como pode ser

torpe para os torpes. Sim, leitora castíssima [...] podeis ler o capítulo até ao fim, sem susto nem vexame. (87)

Worried that some of his readers, particularly his female readers, may find some of the content inappropriate or offensive, and because he finds writing it in Latin would be impractical, he decides to put the story into “outro capítulo.” Further demonstrating his apprehension, Dom Casmurro provides a brief respite for his “leitora” before entering into the potentially offensive section:

Por mais composto que este me saia, há sempre no assunto alguma coisa menos austera, que pede umas linhas de repouso e preparação. Sirva este de preparação. [...] E aqui verás tal ou qual esperteza minha; portanto, ao ler o que vás ler, é provável que o aches menos cru do que esperavas. (87–88)

By providing these “linhas de repouso e preparação,” Dom Casmurro allows his readers—both female (“leitora castíssima”) and male (“leitor meu amigo”)—to prepare for the following chapter. By pausing and recognizing this issue of decorum, Dom Casmurro, shows a clear awareness of his reader and establishes a personalized relationship, but what he really does is manipulate his reader’s response. Hansen makes the following observation, apropos this point:

The narrator is interested in and even sympathizes with his readers, and pretends to concur with their opinions, based as they are on common sense. His image is produced by his readers’ interpretation, and it is not one with which he is necessarily in agreement. In a sense, he abdicates responsibility for what he says, appearing to be cynical when all he is really doing is reflecting the cynical ideas of his readers—at least his readers at that time. (247)

Dom Casmurro tailors his narration to the needs of his readers. In this particular case he creates a separate chapter to allow his reader to compose himself, or herself, before reading the next chapter. Moreover, Dom Casmurro lays bare the inner mechanics of his writing. By creating a chapter break for the benefit of his reader, he demonstrates that what his reader thinks about his narration is of great importance. If the reader appreciates, or believes, Dom Casmurro's attempts to improve the overall reading experience, he will perhaps be more sympathetic to the narrator-protagonist's plight—that of justifying his actions. By removing this seemingly insignificant two-paragraph chapter, the reader of the Scott-Buccleuch translation does not receive the full measure of this personalized, yet deeply manipulative, relationship between narrator and reader.

In chapter 58, "O Tratado," Dom Casmurro, in a digression, talks about his youthful response to seeing the legs and undergarments of a woman who falls down in the street. He recounts how these sexual urges turned into fantasies while he walked back to the seminary:

Dali em diante, até o seminário, não vi mulher na rua, a quem não desejasse uma queda; a algumas adivinhei que traziam as meias esticadas e as ligas justas... Tal haveria que nem levasse meias... Mas eu as via com elas... Ou então... Também é possível... (88)

What interests us is not so much the content but the form, particularly the usage of ellipses. Dom Casmurro even explains why he uses them: "Vou esgarçando isto com reticências, para dar uma idéia das minhas

idéias, que eram assim difusas e confusas; com certeza não dou nada” (88). Dom Casmurro suggests that the ellipses represent the diffusive and confusing thoughts that entered his mind. Even so, he readily admits his inability to convey what he means. What we intuit as readers is that the protagonist-narrator also inserts “ellipses”—omissions, suppressions, and rewritings—that confuse and diffuse his own narrative, the one that we are currently reading. Throughout this elliptical and digressive section that Scott-Buccleuch removes, Dom Casmurro consistently and constantly alludes to his unreliability as a narrator. Without this chapter, therefore, the reader’s ability to interpret the complex metanarrative is severely limited.

Chapter 59, “Convivas de Boa Memória,” is perhaps the axis around which this entire elliptical section revolves. With its deletion the reader misses a crucial aspect in understanding the complex relationship between author, narrator, and reader developed in *Dom Casmurro*. The narrator dedicates an entire chapter to questioning the accuracy of his memory while commenting on the act of writing. The relationship between memory, desire, and writing lies at the center of the creative partnership that exists between his reader and himself, and by extension between Machado de Assis and his reader. Moreover, Dom Casmurro’s ruminations in this chapter undermine his reliability as a narrator. He writes:

Há dessas reminiscências que não descansam antes que a pena ou a língua as publique. Um antigo dizia arrenegar de

conviva que tem boa memória. A vida é cheia de tais convivas, e eu sou acaso um deles, conquanto a prova de ter a memória fraca seja exatamente não me acudir agora o nome de tal antigo; mas era um antigo, e basta. (89)

Dom Casmurro comments on the desire to utilize writing to process the memories of his adolescence. He freely admits, however, that his memory is fallible. The fact that he cannot remember the name of the writer he paraphrases, as he points out, is proof positive of his difficulty in remembering details. The final phrase, “mas era um antigo, e basta” demonstrates how he glides over specific details when a broader perspective suffices. If these details are inconsequential, then perhaps Dom Casmurro paints his memories in broad strokes, consciously leaving out specific details simply due to the fact that he cannot remember, or that he chooses not to remember. He continues: “Não, não, a minha memória não é boa. Ao contrário, é comparável a alguém que tivesse vivido por hospedarias, sem guardar delas nem caras nem nomes, e somente raras circunstâncias” (91). Again, Dom Casmurro claims his memory is not good. The comparison of his memory to a boarder that goes through life forgetting names and faces, however, is striking because throughout his narration he has been able to recall, with great attention to detail, the names and mannerisms of all the significant people and of all the noteworthy events of his life. Either Dom Casmurro truly is forgetful, or he has a selective memory, choosing which elements to highlight in his narration.

This second supposition, which engages the alert, active reader, is more likely in spite of his numerous claims that his memory is faulty. Santiago argues that Dom Casmurro's text "obedece a desígnios apriorísticos, óbvios ou camuflados, mas sempre sob o devido controle daquele que lembra, que escreve [...]" (38). Moreover, much like a prosecutor, Dom Casmurro desires a specific verdict from the jury, that is, the reader. We have already established that the narrator occasionally suppresses information, as in the case of the name of the anonymous author of the "Panegírico de Santa Mônica." What else does Dom Casmurro choose to exclude? What silences does he introduce into his text? Dom Casmurro continues:

Como eu invejo os que não esqueceram a cor das primeiras calças que vestiram! Eu não atino com a das que enfiei ontem. Juro só que não eram amarelas porque execro essa cor; mas isso mesmo pode ser olvido e confusão.

In this humorous remark, Dom Casmurro continues in his attempt to convince the reader of his difficulty in remembering the most basic of details. But even when he states a fact without equivocation, in the same breath he negates this assertion by suggesting that forgetfulness and confusion may have clouded his recollection.

Dom Casmurro draws attention to his unreliability by claiming his memory is faulty, even though his narration is highly detailed. This incongruence further destabilizes the narrator's reliability because the reader wonders whether or not Dom Casmurro's claims of a poor memory

are simply a ruse. In the second half of this chapter, the narrator connects his forgetfulness and confusion to the act of writing:

E antes seja olvido que confusão; explico-me. Nada se emenda bem nos livros confusos, mas tudo se pode meter nos livros omissos. Eu quando leio algum desta outra casta, não me aflijo nunca. O que faço, em chegando ao fim, é cerrar os olhos e evocar todas as coisas que não achei nele. [...] É que tudo se acha fora de um livro falho, leitor amigo. Assim preencho as lacunas alheias; assim podes também preencher as minhas. (90)

This section is perhaps the most important in understanding the metanarrative structure, that is, the relationship between narrator and reader. Dom Casmurro explains that he fills in the gaps of books that have omissions and he invites the reader to do the same with this book. On one level, Dom Casmurro admits indirectly that his narration contains omissions, due to forgetfulness and confusion. This further weakens the narrator-protagonist's arguments because he recognizes, whether consciously or subconsciously, that his text contains elisions, suppressions, and lacunae. By inviting the reader to fill in the gaps of his life, Dom Casmurro further destabilizes the central arguments of his narration, as Santiago argues:

Ao incumbir um outro de complementar sua história, [Dom Casmurro] explicita—ainda que seja por pura dissimulação—sua incompletude não só como narrador, mas, retrospectivamente, como vivenciador das experiências relatadas. O leitor, portanto, aparece figurado como uma espécie de extensão complementar do narrador, também incompleto, cindido. (222–23)

On the metanarrative level, it can be argued that, in certain circumstances, Machado de Assis inserts himself into the text through

the voice of Dom Casmurro and, at times, speaks directly to the reader. If the reader has not grasped it by now, Machado infers that this text, the novel *Dom Casmurro*, is not like other texts, which rely on a more passive reader. The reader, consequently, must actively engage in ascribing meaning and in drawing conclusions.

The reader of Scott-Buccluch's translation, however, does not receive these instructions from the author, and therefore misses out on the greater theoretical implications of the novel. Conceivably, the reader can intuit the overall metanarrative purpose of the novel based on self-reflective comments elsewhere, but the fact remains that this particular chapter explicitly summarizes Machado de Assis's aim in including the reader in the construction of the text and, consequently, the interpretation thereof. Scott-Buccluch's decision to omit these comments to the reader severely weakens and distorts the metanarrative relationship between author, narrator, and reader. By removing this chapter, in conjunction with the others that make up this section, Scott-Buccluch effectively hobbles the reader's ability to grasp the overall structure of the novel and to appreciate the technical and theoretical brilliance of Machado de Assis. As a result, the reader comes away missing the great achievement of the novel, the fact that his or her participation is not merely desirable but indispensable. In terms of the technical innovations of *Dom Casmurro*, Capitu's innocence or guilt is inconsequential. It is the way in which Dom Casmurro retells his story

that is of great import. By removing these chapters, Scott-Bucleuch reduces Machado's masterpiece of metafiction to a mediocre story about a case of possible adultery. Scott-Bucleuch's translation seriously compromises the reputation of Machado's work in inter-American literature because it is not an accurate reflection of the original text and people who read it will not find it an impressive text.

In the following chapter, "Querido Opúsculo," Dom Casmurro continues the train of thought of the previous chapter. The "páginas amarelas" of the *Panegírico* inspire other memories. He rereads chapter 58 about the "cocadas" and comments that after he wrote that section he let out a cry of "saudade." He then asked a musician friend to transcribe this cry into musical notation so that he could add it as an addendum to the chapter. After showing the transcription to another musician, who sees it as uninspiring, Dom Casmurro removes it. He then makes the following comment about self-editing: "Para que não aconteça o mesmo aos outros profissionais que porventura me lerem, melhor é poupar ao editor do livro o trabalho e a despesa da gravura. Vês que não pus nada, nem ponho" (90). This section exhibits several important points beyond the self-referential intertextuality. First, Dom Casmurro reveals to the reader that he claims to be a self-monitoring and self-editing writer. Second, the authoritative opinions of his readers carry significant weight. Third, the fact that Dom Casmurro admits to going back and editing his text, which is his prerogative as the "author," gives the reader cause to

wonder what else the narrator has retrospectively altered, and why. Dom Casmurro has already invited the reader to fill in the gaps of the story; this section further enhances the creative relationship between Dom Casmurro and his reader. In a shocking case of translator error, Scott-Buccleuch decides this chapter is not needed and removes it from his translation. In chapter 58 we see how Dom Casmurro uses ellipses to graphically represent his fragmentary thoughts. In chapter 59 he encourages the reader to fill in the gaps of Dom Casmurro's life. Here, in chapter 60, Dom Casmurro recounts how he has added to and taken away from his life's story. This section of three chapters exhibits the unreliability of the narrator, while also emphasizing the importance of the reader. Without these chapters, the reader of Scott-Buccleuch's translation has no chance to see Dom Casmurro slowly subvert his own argument by admitting that even his own story contains gaps and omissions. Dom Casmurro reveals the blind spot to his own narration, the removal of which becomes the blind spot of the Scott-Buccleuch translation.

Chapters 63, "Metades de um Sonho," and 64, "Uma idéia e um escrúpulo" contain several metafictional elements. In the latter, Dom Casmurro pauses to reflect upon what he has written so far: "Relendo o capítulo passado, acode-me uma idéia e um escrúpulo. O escrúpulo é justamente de escrever a idéia, [...]. Deixei o manuscrito, e olhei para as paredes" (96). He reminds us of his objective in writing this book:

Sabes que esta casa do Engenho Novo, nas dimensões, disposições e pinturas, é reprodução da minha antiga casa de Matacavalos. Outrossim, como te disse no capítulo II, o meu fim em imitar a outra foi ligar as duas pontas da vida, o qua aliás não alcancei. (96)

Here, Dom Casmurro reminds us of his goal to tie together the two points of his life. Throughout this process of recounting the memories and desires that connect these two points, the narrator reveals his unreliability and his intention in creating digressions, introducing silences, making contradictory statements, and even redacting information he had previously included in his life's story. But, the reader of Scott-Buccleuch's translation misses much of the mesmerizing complexity of the metanarrative structure. As Patai states:

He has largely suppressed the theme of [Dom Casmurro's] effort to construct a seamless web, an effort in which he is constantly frustrated by his own digressions. In other words, he has eliminated much of the metanarrative that is absolutely crucial to understanding [Dom Casmurro] and his task in composing the story we ostensibly have before us [...] All this has been sacrificed in the interest (judging by the achieved effect) of advancing the plot. (97)

We have seen in detail how the removal of these nine chapters hinders the reader's ability to follow this metanarrative and to participate in the creation of and the interpretation of the text, which is the point of the real author, Machado de Assis. Patai adequately summarizes the overall outcome of Scott-Buccleuch's decision to abridge the text:

[T]he effect of the translator's deletion of nine chapters is to reduce enormously the complexity and self-reflexivity of the original. For those who believe the interest of the novel lies above all in Bento and Capitu's relationship, and who simply want to get on with the story, little damage will perhaps have

been done. But to readers who want to know what Machado as a novelist is up to, the loss is inestimable. (98)

Dom Casmurro omits, suppresses, elides, and redacts his text while diverging from the story he narrates. These parenthetical asides, which seem superficial or unimportant upon a first reading, are actually crucial and, when examined with a greater level of scrutiny, undermine the narrator's reliability. Dom Casmurro contradicts himself throughout these digressions, casting doubt on his memory and veracity, exposing his own exculpatory intentions. Machado de Assis, speaking through his narrator, informs his reader that this is a new kind of text, one in which the reader participates in the act of creation by ascribing meaning to and drawing interpretations from the text, and, most importantly, by freeing herself or himself from the (possibly) self-interested rule of the narrator.

This relationship between author and reader, one that Machado develops to its fullest degree in *Dom Casmurro*, seems to anticipate a multitude of critical theories of the twentieth century, in particular, Roland Barthes's notion of the death of the author. When Barthes declared the death of the author, he was not heralding a new era of writing; rather, he was observing a trend that had already occurred. Machado anticipates Barthes's concepts of the death of the author and the birth of the reader in *Dom Casmurro* by creating, as we have seen, a self-conscious and unreliable, yet playful, narrator who dialogues with

his readers. Roland Barthes first published “The Death of the Author”⁹ in 1967, and it gained a stronger foothold in the academic community when it appeared ten years later in the collection of essays *Image-Music-Text*. The key argument of Barthes is that an author’s intentions and biographical context in creating a text are irrelevant to the interpretation. This approach separates the writer from writing: “Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body of writing” (*Image* 142). What is written takes precedence over the writer. Writing that suppresses the author is impersonal, without subject, and free from the trappings of history and biography: “it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality [...] to reach that point where only language acts, ‘performs’, and not ‘me’” (*Image* 143). This concept of writing also opens up our understanding of the narrator and characters of a given text:

[T]he relation between the writer and his characters; by making of the narrator not he who has seen and felt nor even he who is writing, but he who is going to write (the young man in the novel—but, in fact, how old is he and who is he?—wants to write but cannot; the novel ends when writing at last becomes possible). (*Image* 144)

In the case of *Dom Casmurro*, published in 1899, we see the author, Machado de Assis, hand the creative reins over to the narrator-protagonist, the “implied author”¹⁰ of the text (Booth 74–75). In this first-

⁹ The essay, first published in English in *Aspen*, appeared in French in 1968 in *Manteia*.

¹⁰ The “implied author”—following the terminology of Iser, Genette, Fish, and Booth—

person account, Dom Casmurro continuously and self-consciously draws attention to the fact that what he is writing is artifice by pointing out the literary techniques that produce the illusion of realism. Barthes calls this new style of writing *scriptible*, or writerly, one that requires the participation of the reader:

The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. (S/Z 5)

As in “Death of the Author,” Barthes calls attention to the immediacy of the “*here and now*” of the reader’s participation in the creation of the text. The result is a “modern scriptor” that is born “simultaneously with the text” and within the text (145). Barthes insists, “the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text” (S/Z 4).

Anticipating the poststructuralist notion of “aporia,” Machado intimates there are gaps in this novel and the reader has to fill them in order to create meaning from the text. Building on Barthes’s concept of the death of the author, as well as Umberto Eco’s notion of the open text, Antonio Luciano Tosta explores the “entreabertura” of Machado’s narrative (37). This state of being halfway open, an “in-betweenness,” resides in Machado’s use of authorial power while allowing the reader to

refers to the diegetic narrator who is also the supposed writer of the text.

fill in the gaps and breathe life into the text (37). All metafiction, according to Linda Hutcheon, “demands that [the reader] participate, that he engage himself intellectually, imaginatively, and affectively in its co-creation” (7). Again, this idea of the responsibilities of the reader in metafiction falls into line with Barthes’s concept of the author’s death. Dixon explores this concept throughout Machado’s *oeuvre*, while pointing out the paradoxical nature of the relationship between author, narrator, and reader:

The fact that the narrator provides contradictory evidence, and even suggests that the reader may want to “preencher as lacunas” (chap. lix) in his text, creates a narrative conundrum going beyond the question of the speaker’s “reliability” or “unreliability.” Because he informs the reader that his tale is suspect, he is paradoxical, as in the case of the famous “liar paradox” (Dixon “Paradoxo”), and creates a situation where one must believe in order to disbelieve, or vice versa. (“Defunto” 50)

Consequently, Machado de Assis, in creating a paradoxical narrator that invites the reader as co-conspirator in the creation process, marks the metaphorical death of the author, while at the same time reinforcing the importance of the author.

Guimarães argues that Machado constructs his text in such a way that each reader can bring a different, yet valid, reading to the novel. Because of the multiple fissures, contradictions, omissions, corrections, and gaps, Machado creates a space in which multiple and even discordant readings are possible (216). It all depends upon the value and

belief systems that the reader imposes on the “texto radicalmente ambíguo do romance” (216). Guimarães continues:

A narração se apresenta com lacunas suficientes de modo a permitir que os leitores, como faz o próprio [Dom Casmurro], tenham espaço suficiente para projetar sua própria subjetividade, identificando-se e desidentificando-se com personagens e diferentes interpretações dos fatos narrados. (234)

Therefore, the reader’s subjectivity and value systems enter into the process of interpretation. The reader becomes more than just an accomplice, but a co-creator of the text (Guimarães 215). One of the surprising extraliterary aspects of this novel is this innovative approach to the relationship between author, narrator, narratee, and reader. Dixon summarizes the theoretical implications of *Dom Casmurro*, generally, and of this chapter, specifically:

A passagem revela uma teoria de recepção verdadeiramente radical para a época, uma antecipação do modelo fenomenológico da leitura, tal como elaborado por teóricos como Roman Ingarden e Wolfgang Iser. O “livro omissivo” do narrador é uma “casta” especial de livro, mas a distinção reconhece que o texto lido pode considerar-se, na realidade, um trabalho inacabado, cuja terminação depende do leitor. Ao fechar os olhos e evocar elementos não achados no texto, o narrador define o texto escrito como um fenômeno incompleto, de espaços abertos, que devem ser completados pela imaginação do leitor. Tal concepção do processo da leitura é o mesmo de Iser, quando este coloca a noção do texto cujas “lacunas” são preenchidas por um leitor ativo, co-produtor do significado da mensagem escrita. (215–16)

What we can conclude, then, is that Machado de Assis effectively anticipates many of the theoretical underpinnings of reader-response theory, as seen by Iser, and to some extent the reception theories of

Jauss.¹¹ As Dixon points out, Iser's theory focuses on the role of the reader to fill in the gaps present in the text in order to construct meaning. *Dom Casmurro* is a novel that perhaps best exemplifies what is now known as reader-response theory.

As Machado rejects the form of the realist novel, liberating fiction from the mimetic representation of reality, he explores the malleability of narrative structure. In the character of Dom Casmurro, Machado creates an unreliable and playful narrator that taunts the reader, who draws attention to his writings as artifice, and who even sometimes speaks for the author, although the ambiguous nature of the narrator makes us as readers question everything. Machado sees his text as “um sistema semiótico em que cada elemento, o signo, se refere a outro elemento, ou signo, e não a uma realidade exterior ao sistema” (Fitz, “Machado, Borges e Clarice” 134). By blurring the traditional boundaries of reality and fiction, the roles and responsibilities of author, narrator, and reader, are continuously deferred just as the meanings of words are postponed in an endless chain of signifiers. The various roles are defined in relation to the other roles, and yet those are only different inasmuch as they differ from one another. The situation is compounded, however, when we ask the question: who has the responsibility of assigning the roles of author, narrator, and reader within a given text? If the author is dead, as Barthes suggests, then the responsibility falls upon the reader to assign

¹¹ See Tosta's “Machado de Assis: A obra entreaberta” for further discussion on reader-response theories developed in *Dom Casmurro*.

meaning. But in order for the reader to decipher, decode, and interpret, there must be a text. Thus we see the acts of (re)reading and (re)writing perpetuated ad infinitum in a quagmire of *différance*. Does the birth of the reader imply the (re)birth of the author? Foucault certainly seems to think so, as stated in “What Is an Author?”: “A certain number of notions that are intended to replace the privileged position of the author actually seem to preserve that privilege and suppress the real meaning of his disappearance” (143). Machado de Assis, in his development of the complex, intertwined—and oft times, paradoxical—relationships between author, narrator, narratee, and reader, precedes many theoretical underpinnings of contemporary approaches to reading literature, including Barthes’s notion of the death of the author, reader-response theory, and poststructuralism. Consequently, Scott-Bucleuch’s abridgment effectively limits the contemporary reader’s ability to appreciate the virtuosity of Machado’s metanarrative strategy within the context of contemporary theoretical approaches to narrative fiction.

Conclusion

The chapters Scott-Bucleuch removes, as I have shown, are fundamental in establishing the metanarrative relationship between author, narrator, and reader in ascribing meaning to the text. Scott-Bucleuch restricts the reader’s participation, and by doing so, renders a misrepresentative, and laundered, version of the original. *Dom Casmurro*

is much more than just a story about adultery, but the Scott-Buccleuch translation limits the overall vision and brilliance of both the original novel and of its author, Machado de Assis. Those who read Scott-Buccleuch's edited version miss out on one of the great works of Brazilian literature, a reality that hinders Machado's reception in inter-American literature. Finally, this particular translation is misrepresentative not only of *Dom Casmurro* but of Machado's post-1880 *oeuvre*. Critics such as Sontag, Bloom, and González Echevarría, among others, continue to praise the brilliance of Machado de Assis, but those who read Scott-Buccleuch's translation of *Dom Casmurro* will come away with a deeply flawed perception of the novel. For this reason, it is imperative to inform and educate the reader who is interested but not specialized in Brazilian and Latin American literature about the pitfalls of the Scott-Buccleuch translation of *Dom Casmurro*. On the spectrum of translation "success" and "failure" that I have attempted to establish, Scott-Buccleuch's translation resides at the end of outright "failure" since it so badly distorts the technical brilliance of *Dom Casmurro* and thus sullies both the novel and the reputation of Machado de Assis.

CONCLUSION

In my concluding remarks, I wish to address three related topics germane to my overall project. First, I discuss the role translation played in the reception and influence of Latin American literature in the United States during the 1960s. In the Introduction, I examined the process by which translations were produced and introduced to the US literary establishment. This section details how and why Latin American writers influenced US authors of the time. Second, I examine why Brazilian literature, for the most part, has not been as well received or as influential as Spanish American literature in the United States. Part of this poor reception is due to historical and cultural issues, but I contend that Brazilian letters has suffered from a greater degree of flawed and “failed” translations. Finally, I will return to the issue of inter-American literature and discuss the importance translations and the study of translation have played and will continue to play in the development of this new field of comparative literary study.

Latin American Literature in the United States and the Revitalization of American Letters

In the Introduction, I discussed how the Boom literature of Latin America, in English translation, took hold in the literary establishment of New York, and, almost immediately, the rest of the United States. Latin American culture and literature came to the attention of the US government, in part, because of the events surrounding the Cuban Revolution and its aftermath. While this helps explain how a number of Spanish American writers and intellectuals came into prominence, it

does not explain why publishers, critics, and other writers in the United States so enthusiastically received them. Notwithstanding the crucial importance of the sociopolitical and economic climate of the 1960s, this overwhelmingly positive reception was due, in large part, to the stagnant nature of American literature in the 1960s. As Lowe and Fitz explain:

[B]efore the establishment of Latin American literature in the United States, a great many artists and intellectuals were decrying what seemed to be the rapidly escalating perversion of the American experience, its debased values, its brazen hypocrisy, its crude materialism, and its blatant meretriciousness. [...] In a certain sense, then, the Boom literature of Latin America can be said to have rekindled in the writers of the United States a new commitment to their own potency as social commentators and critics and, just as important, to their own validity as intellectuals. (8)

In 1965, John Updike published “The Author as Librarian” in the *New Yorker*, which I referenced in my discussion of Borges. Updike, in this seminal essay, expressed his hope that Borges’s refreshing approach to literature could show “blocked” writers “the way out of the dead-end narcissism and downright trashiness of present American fiction” (62). Updike was among the first critics to deem a Latin American author worthy of emulation by American writers. In 1967, as the Boom was gathering force, Stephen Koch decried, in *TriQuarterly Review*, what was, in his view, the deplorable condition of American literature in the late 1950s and 1960s. Calling for “another rebirth” in American writing, he devotes the opening words of his essay to the issue of literary silence:

At the moment, our literature is idling in a period of hiatus [...]. Even though there is a large body of work, nothing thus

far has been heard on the highest levels except an eerie silence.

The most important critical question to be asked now concerns how and when this silence will be broken [...] it *must* be broken, for in the past fifteen years writing in English has touched bottom and survived what in my opinion will eventually be regarded as the lowest and most impoverished point in its history. (5)

This silence, as Lowe and Fitz point out, “became one of the critical touchstones of the time.” In her 1969 essay, “The Aesthetics of Silence,” Susan Sontag reflects on the rhetoric and topoi of ennui, frivolousness, “silence,” “emptiness,” “reduction,” and the “zero degree” present in the experimental literary production of US writers in the 1960s. “The art of our time,” Sontag writes, in reference to the United States, “is noisy with appeals for silence. A coquettish, even cheerful nihilism. One recognizes the imperative of silence, but goes on speaking a way to say *that*” (187–88). Expanding on this issue, Payne explains:

The desire expressed in the rhetoric of silence [...] is for a literary energy to rush into the void from afar, allowing the continuation of speech, even after the possibilities of speaking seem to have been exhausted once and for all. (14)

Nevertheless, this silence had come about because “American culture had so exhausted and frustrated itself” resulting in “the disjunction of literature and its sociopolitical context” (Lowe and Fitz 7). This relationship between art and society, as Lowe and Fitz discuss it, “was anathema to most Latin American writers, whose experience with brutally repressive regimes had taught them that the right to speak is an essential one for a healthy society and that it is the obligation of the

writer to have something significant to say” (7). Mario Vargas Llosa’s essay, “La literatura es fuego,” exemplifies the differences between Latin American and North American writers of this time in the level of sociopolitical commitment and engagement in their writing. The “nihilism” to which Sontag refers, and that she, and others like Koch and Updike, believed characterized US writing during the 1950s and early 1960s, contrasts sharply with the understanding of literature as a force for social change that had long characterized Latin American writing. Sontag, while not as apocalyptic in tone as Koch, does not see “immediate answers to the difficult dilemmas [the aesthetics of asceticism] poses for artistic consciousness” (Payne 13).

John Barth expands on these ideas in his famous and influential 1968 essay “The Literature of Exhaustion,” which I also briefly discussed in regards to Borges’s initial reception. What sets Barth’s ruminations apart from those of Updike, Koch, or Sontag is that, with Latin American texts in mind, he looks toward a new way of approaching literature. Like Updike had earlier suggested, Barth points to the work of Jorge Luis Borges as a way out of the tired, worn-out, and languid narrative forms that he, too, believed were plaguing the American literary scene in the 1960s. While Updike praises Borges, he does not discuss in detail and in specific terms, how and why Borges could be such a beneficial influence to US writers, that is, if they were ready, artistically and culturally, to

receive inspiration from a Latin American writer. Barth, however, as I previously discussed, explores Borges's singular narrative style.

Like his contemporary critics, Barth first paints a picture of the drab situation in American letters, describing it as "the literature of exhausted possibility" or "the literature of exhaustion." Says Barth:

By "exhaustion" I don't mean anything so tired as the subject of physical, moral, or intellectual decadence, only the used-upness of certain forms of the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities—by no means necessarily a cause for despair. (*Friday* 64)

While many interpreted and misread Barth's statement as "one more Death of the Novel or Swan-Song of Literature piece," Barth meant it to be a mere reflection of the state of American literature, as he observed it, "in that somewhat apocalyptic place and time" (64, 205). Moreover, Barth was speaking about the "exhaustion" of literary approaches, or "forms," intended to maintain verisimilitude. As Fitz explains:

When Barth, steeped in the Anglo-American narrative tradition, wrote that he was concerned with the "used-upness" of certain forms, he was talking about Realism and its traditional confidence in what was assumed to be the close and vital connection between the word and the object, between language and reality, and especially three-dimensional reality. ("The Reception of Machado de Assis" 30).

Years later in his 1980 companion piece, "The Literature of Replenishment," Barth reiterates the argument that "artistic conventions are liable to be retired, subverted, transcended, transformed, or even deployed against themselves to generate new and lively work" (*Friday* 205). Even later, he elucidates:

With the clarity of hindsight I see it to have been groping toward a definition of the spirit of postmodernism, as I understand that slippery term: an aesthetic for the making of new and valid work that is yet responsible to the exhaustive, even apocalyptic vastness of what has been done before. (*Further Fridays* 169)

In his 1968, Boom-era essay, Barth simply used the brilliant work of Borges as an example of an artist who had overcome that debilitating state of “used-upness” and forged a new kind of literature, one already known in Spanish America as “la nueva narrativa” that emphasized not the mimesis of realism but the fictive, “fantastic” nature of writing and literature. Barth, like Updike, as I discussed earlier, saw Borges as a wellspring of inspiration for the deteriorating condition of American literature.

“The Literature of Exhaustion,” widely read and profoundly influential, was a “milestone in inter-American relations,” because, like Updike’s essay, it marked an instance in which “a major American writer and critic had publically celebrated a Latin American writer, Borges, [...] as the solution to their ‘crises of confidence.’” Barth’s essay, consequently, “greatly facilitated the reception of Latin American literature in the United States” (“The Reception of Machado de Assis” 28). Payne observes that many critics eventually began to view Latin American literature, thanks in large part to Barth’s eye-opening essays, in the following light:

It is in this context that the boom of Latin American fiction in English translation, which began in the sixties, and the specific form of reception—and often distortion—it has taken

in the minds of US writers and readers can be understood. An equally self-conscious and experimental but more vigorous, fertile, and “organic” Latin American fiction, rushed, by most accounts, into the sterile vacuum of impoverished American writing. An infusion of the tropic staved off the entropic. (15)

A combination of sociopolitical and aesthetic reasons, therefore, contributed to this enthusiastic reception of Latin American literature—a body of writing that was previously denigrated, disparaged, and ignored, but, by the 1960s, used as a source of inspiration, “a catalyst, a transforming force” to revivify American literature (Lowe and Fitz 164).

In 1987, William Gass published “The First Seven Pages of the Boom” in a special issue of *Latin American Literary Review*, a collection of essays that took a retrospective look twenty years after the Boom. Gass reflects on the positive, yet often distorted, nature of the Boom and its reception in the United States. In the opinion of Lowe and Fitz, the following statement “accurately sums up the rancorous social, political, and economic history that continues to mar the inter-American experience” (13):

And if these South American nations had not been previously despised by a North American commercial culture which had continuously exploited them; and if they weren't so carelessly differentiated and indiscriminately lumped (Brazilians and Bolivians are simply Latin, Central America is the same as South; in fact, in the mind of most Americans, Mexico falls like a full skirt all the way to Patagonia); if they hadn't been thought to be Spaniards gone native, mostly asleep beneath their sombreros, and of slowly mixing blood, although when awake also of mean bandito intentions; then where would the boom have come from—this boom as if from one gun? [...] booms reverberate only

from unexpected places, suddenly and sonically, as if from empty air. Nothing was there before, and then BOOM! [...]

It is because we have not been paying proper attention that everything seems to be going off at once. ("Boom" 34-35)

Gass reminds the reader that until the Boom, many denigrated and disparaged Latin American literature, ignoring the rich cultural, historical, and literary traditions of each country. Language and literature scholars considered Spanish and Portuguese lesser languages without developed literary traditions worthy of serious academic study. This attitude of ignorance, apathy, and, at times, hostility, makes the reception of Latin American literature in the United States all the more problematic, but also astonishing when we consider the generally warm reception in the 1960s. With respect to this question, however, perhaps the most decisive element was the rather deplorable state of US literature of the time.

Given the excellence of the Latin American literature that was being translated, it seems certain that its influence on American letters would have eventually taken place anyway, though it also seems likely that the speed of its dissemination and acceptance was accelerated by the doldrums that these commentators felt afflicted creative writing in the United States at the time. (Lowe and Fitz 164)

John Barth, as one of these more open-minded commentators, continually championed the quality of Latin American literature throughout his career. He frequently wrote about his indebtedness to progenitors, such as, Machado de Assis, Borges, Cortázar, and García Márquez. He provides one of the clearest and most decisive examples of reception and influence of prominent Latin American writers on a

preeminent North American author that spanned several decades. In a sense, Barth made it acceptable for the American intelligentsia to admire Latin American writers and thinkers, and Borges was the first Latin American writer he championed.

Early in his career, Barth came into contact with the work of Machado de Assis: “his novels *Braz Cubas*, *Quincas Borba*, and *Dom Casmurro* had just been translated, belatedly, into English—and something clicked,” in his imagination (*Further Fridays* 44).¹ Machado de Assis taught Barth “how to combine formal sportiveness with genuine sentiment as well as a fair degree of realism.” The novel supplied him with “model resolutions of a problem” that was hindering his writing, the problem of how to write about serious topics—in this case, nihilism—via a comic style (*Further Fridays* 257, 165). He continues:

Machado’s combination of formal playfulness, narrative self-consciousness and self-reflexiveness, political skepticism, and emotional seriousness tempered with dry comedy—they add up to a kind of proto-postmodernism which appealed to me very strongly indeed. (*Further Fridays* 44)

In fact, Barth “suggests that *Epitaph of a Small Winner* can even be considered a legitimate prototype of the post-modernist novel,” which “had a profound (and entirely felicitous) influence on [his] first published

¹ Barth read the following: *Memórias póstumas de Bras Cubas* (1881), translated as *Epitaph of a Small Winner* (1952) by William Grossman; *Quincas Borba* (1891), translated as *Philosopher or Dog?* (1954) by Clotilde Wilson; and *Dom Casmurro* (1899), translated by Helen Caldwell (1953).

novel, *The Floating Opera* (1956)” (15, 21).² Moreover, Fitz points out “it is ‘proto’ only chronologically” since “in other, key respects [...] it is a fully realized example of its kind” (20–21). By his own admission, Barth clearly found something in Machado’s prose that inspired him to overcome certain challenges in his own writing and complete his first novel (Fitz “*Memórias póstumas*” 21). Certainly, Machado deserves the praise Barth lauds upon him, but we must remember that Barth was not reading *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, a late-nineteenth-century novel written in Portuguese, but *Epitaph of a Small Winner*, Grossman’s 1952 English translation. We must understand further that Barth would have never read Machado de Assis without the efforts of Grossman, Wilson, and Caldwell, who produced highly readable, reliable, and faithful translations of these three iconoclastic novels.

As years passed, Machado’s influence on Barth seems to have waned. In 1966, when Barth’s fourth novel, *Giles Goat Boy*, was going to press, Barth says a graduate student introduced him to the *Ficciones* of Jorge Luis Borges (*Further Fridays* 168). He describes this encounter: “[U]pon first encountering Borges’s *Ficciones* [...], I had the disorienting though familiar feeling that everything must stop until I had assimilated this extraordinary writer” (45). The impact of narratives, such as “The Secret Miracle,” “The Zahir,” “Pierre Menard,” “Funes the Memorious,”

² Fitz sees *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, not “as a ‘realistic’ novel, apropos of its own time” but “as an essentially ‘modernist’ text written some forty years before its time” (7).

“Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,”—all in translation, we must recall—inspired Barth to write “The Literature of Exhaustion.” Inspired by the style of Borges’s *ficciones*, he wrote *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), a collection of loosely connected short stories that lead the reader through a maze of self-reflective metafiction, qualities not hitherto prominent in his work but that would henceforth come to characterize it. Barth writes about the direct influence Borges had on this particular work:

[I]t was the happy marriage of form and context in Borges’s *ficciones*—the way he regularly turned his narrative means into part of his message—that suggested how I might try something similar, in my way and with my materials. (*Further Fridays* 274)

Barth was mesmerized, but more importantly, *inspired*, by Borges’s invigorating approach to literature, especially the way in which “the phenomenon of the text itself, the fact of the artifact, becomes a sign of its sense” (*Further Fridays* 170). Borges showed Barth a new way of viewing literature, a new kind of literary “form.” By manipulating language, style, and structure, Barth could explore new literary regions of reality while proudly displaying the artifice of such mimetic notions. Because of his early introduction to Machado, and his positive reaction to Borges, Barth made an effort to follow the progress and development of Latin American literature even after he was a well-established novelist.

In January of 1980, as previously mentioned, Barth published “The Literature of Replenishment,” an essay that, according to Barth himself, serves “as a companion and corrective” to “The Literature of

Exhaustion.” His purpose in writing this new piece was “to define to [his] satisfaction the term *postmodernism*, which in 1979 was everywhere in the air” (*Friday* 193). He opens the essay with a broad list of postmodernist writers, in which he includes Borges, Cortázar, and García Márquez.³ But it is the latter, again read in Rabassa’s spectacular English translation, to whom Barth devotes the bulk of his admiration in this particular essay. He traces the aesthetics of postmodernism, looking at the opening lines of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (also known to him in English translation), a premodernist text, and Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, a modernist text. He then offers García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as an example of the “great postmodernist opening sentence” (*Friday* 198). Barth calls *One Hundred Years of Solitude* “as impressive a novel as has been written so far in the second half of our century and one of the splendid specimens of that splendid genre from any century” (*Friday* 204). He continues:

Here the synthesis of straightforwardness and artifice, realism and magic and myth, political passion and nonpolitical artistry, characterization and caricature, humor and terror, are so remarkably sustained that one recognizes with exhilaration very early on, as with *Don Quixote* and

³ Although Barth only briefly mentions Cortázar in passing, *Rayuela* (1963), translated by Rabassa as *Hopscotch* (1966), won the US National Book Award for translation. Lowe and Fitz remark: “All the more remarkable, then, is Gregory Rabassa’s pitch-perfect (and prizewinning) translation, a rendition in mid-twentieth-century American English that, step for step, offers a virtuoso double of Cortázar’s own verbal alchemy. There can be no doubt that the critical success of Cortázar and *Hopscotch* came about in large measure because—achieving that rarest of victories in translation work—Rabassa’s version allowed the English-speaking reader to come away with a secure sense of the original’s tone, its dazzling wordplay, its self-reflective semantic complexity, and its quicksilver tonal shifts” (102).

Great Expectations and *Huckleberry Finn*, that one is in the presence of a masterpiece not only artistically admirable, but humanly wise, lovable, literally marvelous. [...] Praise be to the Spanish language and imagination! As Cervantes stands as an exemplar of premodernism and a great precursor of much to come, and Jorge Luis Borges as an exemplar of *dernier cri* modernism and at the same time as a bridge between the end of the nineteenth century and the end of the twentieth, so Gabriel García Márquez is in that enviable succession: an exemplary postmodernist and a master of the storyteller's art. (204–05)

This encomium of García Márquez, as well as his Spanish-language precursors Cervantes and Borges, stands in stark contrast to Barth's comments of the "used-upness" of American fiction, which he wrote about in 1968.

Upon reading *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Barth experienced freshness and vitality that he thought had been lost or become irrecoverable: "I had almost forgotten that new literature can be not only important, not only impressive, but wise and wonderful, life-affecting [...]" (*Further Fridays* 46). Like Borges in 1968, García Márquez showed Barth, in 1980, the possibilities of bringing together multiple strands and weaving them together in a brilliant piece of literature that not only dazzles the mind but also speaks to the human condition.⁴ The Colombian writer, therefore, opened Barth's eyes to previously unseen vistas of literary possibility:

García Márquez showed me not what Postmodernism is, necessarily, but what it ought to be if it is to be anything

⁴ Again, we must remember that Barth did not read *Cien años de soledad*. He read Rabassa's version of it, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which Gabo frequently joked was better than the original.

worth taking seriously. Its author gave *magic*: back to modern storytelling: not literary magic, but literal magic: the literally marvelous. (*Further Fridays* 46)

The power of storytelling, combined with the elements that would be defined as “magical realism,” influenced Barth, as well as many British and American contemporaries, such as, John Fowles, Toni Morrison, Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, Emma Tennant, and Salman Rushdie (47). According to Payne, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, “‘magically’ recover[ed] the conventions and artifices of the past, while at the same time cross-fertilizing US writing with its organic originality” (17). Payne, however, views the American reception of García Márquez more as a distortion, especially in regards to the subsequent cultural mythologizing of magical realism. I touched briefly on this idea in the Introduction explaining that “magical realism,” as Pope remarks, became a “marketing brand that would help the sale of Spanish American novels abroad” (249). Novelists, such as Isabel Allende and Laura Esquivel have capitalized on this cultural and literary “brand,” which has had a homogenizing effect on the US perception of what constitutes Latin American literature. Kristal states:

Today the term has been rejected by many Latin Americans, and by some postcolonial critics, as the internalization of demeaning exoticizing tendencies by Third World writers. It has also been questioned, and even parodied, by a new breed of novelists, including the Chilean Alberto Fuguet and the Bolivian Edmundo Paz Soldán, for whom the realities of Latin America in a globalized world ought not to be taken as exotic or extravagant. (*Latin American Novel* 9)

Nevertheless, Barth and his contemporaries saw something in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* that inspired them to reevaluate their own approaches to writing, thus producing US literature directly affected and positively influenced by Latin American literature. Because Machado (the Scott-Buccleuch version of *Dom Casmurro*, notwithstanding), Borges, and García Márquez appeared in good English translations, John Barth was able to appreciate the brilliance of their writing, a realization that rejuvenated and cultivated his own writing. The underlying message of Barth's twin essays is two-fold: that American literature, during the 1950s and 1960s, was artistically impoverished and that US writers could find inspiration in certain Latin American writers, appearing at the time in good to excellent English translations. Authors turned their attention to the literature of Spanish America, which inspired them and subsequently revitalized American letters. Throughout this entire process, which is the crux of my argument, translation played *the* fundamental role in this historic cross-cultural exchange.

The Marginalization of Brazilian Literature

In the Introduction, I mentioned that Brazilian authors did not receive the same level of critical attention as their Spanish American counterparts, even though, according to González Echevarría, Brazil's narrative tradition is, "with that of the United States, the richest national literature in the New World" ("Introduction" xi-xii). During the Boom,

critics simply did not include Brazilian literature with the movement, in spite of the rich literary heritage and experimental novels of João Guimarães Rosa or Clarice Lispector, or even Machado's work, which had appeared in good translations in the early and mid-1950s. As a result, Brazilian literature has not figured much into the scholarly definition or classification of Latin American literature, or into its reception in the United States of the time. Why, then, were these authors overlooked even though their work was available in English around the same time as Borges, Fuentes, Rulfo, Cortázar, and others at the end of the 1960s? Part of this poor reception, I will show, is due to a history of deeply flawed English translations of canonical texts, starting in the 1920s and even continuing into the 1980s. Among these texts, I analyze the flawed aspects of Aluísio Azevedo's *O cortiço*, Mário de Andrade's *Macunaíma*, and Guimarães Rosa's *Grande sertão: veredas*, which, praised by Rodríguez Monegal (one of the Boom era's most influential scholars), should have been received as one of the great Boom novels.

In his book, *Third World Literary Fortunes: Brazilian Cultures and its International Reception*, Piers Armstrong outlines a compelling theory to explain the rather poor reception of Brazilian culture and literature in the United States:

The international reception of twentieth-century Brazilian literature can only be understood in the context of two contradictory cultural agencies: the literary canon as established by academic literary criticism, and the powerful extraliterary imagery of another Brazil, developed intellectually by humanist social scientists and popularly

through a perspective which might be called either folk wisdom or international tourism. (11)

Whereas literary development in Brazil has largely followed European trends, the development of the social sciences within and without Brazil has propagated specific cultural images such as *carnaval*, urban violence, soccer, tropical beaches, the rainforests, and the uninformed notion that Brazil is free of racism. Brazil experiences a form of “cultural schizophrenia” because of the juxtaposition of material poverty and a robust occidental intellectual community. While the largely white and Eurocentric elite of Brazil avoids mentioning *carnaval* or “Otherness,” Europeans and North Americans prefer to look at the cultural production of the masses instead of the literary production of the elite. Armstrong states: “European taste savors the exotic in Brazil, and thus, socially speaking, the popular over the elite, and ethnically speaking, the Afro-Brazilian and the Amerindian over the Euro-Brazilian” (12). Certainly, the “extraliterary processes” inform literary production in Brazil, but the vast majority of Brazilian writers do not fall in the trap of simply rehashing the same stereotypical images and themes.

The one Brazilian who experienced success at the same level as the Spanish American writers incorporated—and some would argue exploited—many of the exotic and titillating aspects of Northeastern Brazilian culture. Jorge Amado’s *Gabriela, Clove, and Cinnamon* (1958, trans. 1962), was an immediate success. “Phenomenally successful both inside Brazil and abroad,” Armstrong explains, “Amado is virtually the

only Brazilian writer to have had any international impact beyond academic circles” (133–34). Even his least popular novels are in their fiftieth editions or beyond. In spite of his rampant international success and critical acclaim, however, Amado is not without his detractors. For some, he is an ambassador of Brazilian culture, yet for others he is “a faux populist who thinly disguises sexist and racist attitudes behind charming prose.” Many critics see a trend in “sexual and ethnic stereotyping in his post-1958 works” (Lowe and Fitz 64). Regardless, Amado has sold millions of copies throughout the world,⁵ but he certainly seems to be the exception that proves the rule. Because of his immense popularity and visibility, Amado has become the token Brazilian writer that critics include when they deign to include Brazil in the larger framework of Latin American literature. Fitz, in a footnote, enumerates examples of critical work that follow this trend:

Amado, for example, is the only Brazilian writer mentioned by José Donoso in his *Historia personal del boom* and he is the only Brazilian included among such “Latin American” writers as Borges, Vargas Llosa, Cortázar, and García Márquez who are credited, in 1984, with transforming Latin American letters into “an important current in the main stream” of world literature (Wilkie and Hurt, *Literature of the Western World*, 2078). Amado is also the only Brazilian noted, in 1987, by the editors of *The Harper American Literature*, vol. 2, as having helped to “internationalize” American letters.

These critics, who should have known better, simply reinforced cultural stereotypes by overemphasizing Amado’s work at the expense of other

⁵ Armstrong, in *Third World*, points out that much of Amado’s international success was due to his ability to capitalize on both Western and Eastern-block markets (134–35).

outstanding Brazilian writers, like Machado, Rosa, and Clarice. The editors of these influential anthologies, geared toward the English-speaking audience, ultimately did a tremendous disservice by limiting the scope of Brazilian literature, thus intensifying its “invisibility” in US academic culture. In the case of Wilkie and Hurt, it was as if Brazilian literature did not exist as part of the “Western World.” For the English language reader, Amado’s novels, especially those of his post-1958 phase, have become “a fascinating source of exotic and titillating narratives about a vast, unknown country of Brazil,” which Lowe and Fitz consider “a misreading” (64). Nevertheless, for American readers, and many critics, Amado seems to be the one Brazilian novelist they know or at least heard of, ignoring the self-reflective and imaginative narrative tradition that has developed in Brazil since 1500. Unlike Spanish America, however, Brazil has yet to experience its own Boom in the United States.

The reception of Machado de Assis, on the other hand, is a story of missed opportunity. When his work first came out in English translation in the 1950s, it was reviewed positively, for the most part, in the influential periodicals of the time, such as, the *New Yorker*, *New York Times Book Review*, and *New Republic*.⁶ Nevertheless, he was not widely

⁶ Reviews include, in chronological order: Fitts, “A Masterpiece from Brazil,” *New York Times* (13 Jul. 1952); Webster, “A Short Life is Not Bitter...” *Saturday Review* (26 Jul. 1952); West, “A Minor Classic” *New Yorker* (9 Aug. 1952); Fitzgerald, “A Belated Discovery” *New Republic* (15 Sep. 1952); Webster, “The Essential Ambiguities in Us All” *New York Times Book Review* (24 May 1953); “Briefly Noted” *New Yorker* (6 Jun. 1953); Stern, “Illusion of Grandeur” *New York Times Book Review* (18 Jul. 1954); Fitts, “Legacy

read at the time, and only recently, critics like Susan Sontag, Harold Bloom, and Michael Wood have found a renewed appreciation for Machado. Fitz, in his recent article, “The Reception of Machado de Assis in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s,” presents the following questions:

How is it that Machado, whose great novels, *Epitaph of a Small Winner*, *Dom Casmurro*, and *Quincas Borba*, first appearing in the early to mid-1950s and garnering relatively positive critical responses, failed (and to this day still fails) even to be mentioned as one of the “Boom” writers? How are we to explain this gross oversight, this egregious omission? (25)

In an attempt to answer these perplexing questions, Fitz considers the nature of the American intellectual and literary establishment of the time, the initial reception of Machado in the 1950s, and then “the relative ‘disappearance’ of Brazil under the homogenizing rubric known as the Latin American ‘Boom’” (17). As I discussed in the Introduction, the collective eyes of Americans after WWII turned away from Latin America to focus on rebuilding Europe and curtailing the perceived encroachment of Communism in the West. Intellectually, Americans tended “to look inward, at their own situation, and not outward to the rest of the world” (19). In this “largely self-satisfied and fully self-absorbed intellectual

from Brazil” *New Republic* (20 Sep. 1954); Grossman, “Victory and Potatoes.” *Saturday Review* 37 (17 Jul. 1954).

climate,” critics overlooked or gave short shrift to the most salient aspects of Machado’s novels (19, 20).⁷ Fitz states:

In sum, 1950s America did not offer an intellectual climate that would have been hospitable to the acerbic and disillusioned voice of Machado de Assis, and this may well have hurt his reception here. [...] American critics failed to recognize the originality and power of the smooth (even in his early translations) and comic but profoundly iconoclastic Machado de Assis. Had they done so, Machado’s reception in the United States would almost certainly have been different. (20, 21)

Due to the sociopolitical and cultural climate of the United States in the 1950s, American critics, focused on Europe, simply were not prepared to appreciate the literary brilliance of Machado. Questions of race, gender, class, international politics, and economic exploitation could have included Machado, but critics simply overlooked him. Notwithstanding, one American critic, John Barth, as we have already seen, not only discovered these early translations of Machado, but also used them as a source of inspiration when writing his first novel.

At the same time, Barth, it seems, did not fully recognize the singular genius of Machado. Barth turned away from “the benign influence” of Machado and toward “the high-energy extravagances of *The Sot Weed Factor* and its sort of twin, *Giles Goat Boy*” (*Further Fridays* 259), during which time he was introduced to Borges’s *Ficciones*. As we

⁷ Fitz lists the following as “the most important aspects” of Machado’s three principle novels: “their handling of narrative time, metaphor, and collage, their experiments with what would later be called ‘metafiction,’ their creation of self-conscious narrator/protagonists who may or may not be unreliable, their creation of a new, no longer passive reader, their use of irony, and their subtle critiques of the human damage done by the unbridled pursuit of self-interest” (“The Reception of Machado de Assis” 20).

have noted, Borges became a beacon of hope in Barth's quest for new and interesting forms. "That Barth was smitten by Borges's 'new narrative,'" Fitz writes, "is not, therefore, surprising." He continues:

[W]hat is surprising is that he seems to have missed the revolutionary nature of Machado's own "new novel," one that, as early as *Epitaph of a Small Winner*, exemplified a radically new kind of narrative form, one in which a text undercuts the very sense of meaning and stability that its words seem to present and which, quite clear in the case of Machado, sees the urgent need to create a new, more attentive and judicious readers for itself. ("The Reception of Machado de Assis" 30)

Although this enters the slippery realm of speculation, Fitz wonders what would have happened if Barth had paid more attention to the "formal novelistic revolution" found in Machado's "deep and profound *sabedoria*, his wry humor, his lacerating irony, his sharp social consciousness, and his unflinching skepticism":

Had Barth, in the intervening years, thought more about how Machado was rethinking the nature of the novel genre [...] "The Literature of Exhaustion" might well have had a more Brazilian cast to it and, as a result, heightened American interest in Brazilian literature. (31)

For reasons we may never know, Barth shifted his attention away from Machado and toward Borges and, eventually, García Márquez. We must not judge Barth too harshly, however. He remained a champion of Latin American literature, and specifically Hispanic literature, throughout his career. Brazilian scholars involved in the inter-American project lament the fact that Barth apparently did not see in Machado what Sontag or Bloom recognized. If he had, Machado possibly would be a much more

visible writer in the canon of inter-American literature. Nevertheless, as Fitz remarks, “Machado’s proper reception in the United States is finally coming to pass” in the early decades of the twenty-first century (“The Reception of Machado de Assis 33).

Barring the one glaring “failure,” that is, Scott-Bucleuch’s *Dom Casmurro*, Machado’s novels and short story collections have appeared in strong English versions, many in multiple translations, which allows for insightful comparative work. Nevertheless, not all Brazilian texts have been blessed with such capable English-language translators. Although both South American and Brazilian texts have had both translation successes and failures, the record seems to indicate that Brazilian literature, for reasons still not entirely clear, has suffered significantly more “failures” of its canonical authors and texts than has South American literature. Since these flawed texts, and, consequently, flawed authors (in the eyes of their readers), are on library shelves in campuses across the country, they still elicit a negative reception in the unsuspecting English-language readers who might wish to study them as part of a new inter-American project.

Repressing Sexuality in *O cortiço*

O cortiço (1890), by Aluísio Azevedo, chronicles the development of “uma habitação coletiva fluminense” during the second half of the nineteenth century (Moisés, *Literatura brasileira* 249). As a Naturalist novel, in the style of Zola’s *Le roman expérimental*,⁸ Azevedo seeks “to address certain problem areas in human society,” as well as late nineteenth-century society in Rio de Janeiro. According to João Sedycias, in *The Naturalistic Novel of the New World*, Azevedo employs the style and approach of French Naturalists, specifically focusing on “those aspects of Brazilian life [...] that have to deal with the lower class and which to him appear either dysfunctional or pathological” (34). Moisés explains that one of the central themes to the novel is promiscuity: “Toca numa das chagas da sociedade fluminense do século XIX: a habitação coletiva, o ‘cortiço,’ onde impera a promiscuidade” (qtd. in Sedycias 34). Within the veritable melting pot of the *cortiço* interacts a broad cast of characters— young and old, rich and poor, male and female—including “laborers, maids, laundresses, bricklayers, garbage collectors, street peddlers, and an occasional prostitute” (Sedycias 33).

⁸ “In the most influential statement ever made of the theory of naturalism, Émile Zola’s *Le roman expérimental*, the ideal of the naturalist is stated as the selection of truthful instances subjected to laboratory conditions in a novel, where the hypotheses of the author about the nature and operation of the forces that work on human beings can be put to the test” (Harmon 342). See also Sedycias (54–55) for further discussion on Azevedo’s work within the context of Brazilian Naturalism. For example, he does not see *O cortiço* “merely as a straightforward and simplistic New World adaptation of European aesthetic and literary precepts” (54).

It is this last archetypal figure, especially the representation of Léonie, a courtesan, which presents a formidable, and ultimately ruinous, challenge in the first English translation, *A Brazilian Tenement* (1926). Harry W. Brown, in the foreword, states:

The present English version of his *O Cortiço* was commenced as a faithful translation of the Portuguese original, but because of the wide divergence of English from the Portuguese idiom, much of the book is freely paraphrased. It has been sought to conserve the general atmosphere of the original rather than the actual text. A number of incidents and details have been omitted from the English version owing to the squeamish sensibilities of our reading public, whose philosophy is that of the ostrich: when unpleasant situations in life are encountered, the head should be stuck in the sand and, presto, they cease to exist. (viii)

Brown refers to stylistic alterations as well as omissions of content. In fact, the translation excises nearly all passages that portray aspects of human sexuality or sexual acts. Perhaps the most famous, and most drastic, excision is Léonie's encounter with Pombinha, a young woman from the slum. Let us now look at how one of Brown's many edits disrupts the narrative flow and character development of the novel.

Léonie, a wealthy courtesan of French decent, lives in a large home in the city and caters to the prominent and powerful men of Rio de Janeiro. In spite of her socioeconomic status, she frequently visits the women who wash her clothes in the *cortiço*. She takes special interest in their daughters and acts as a godmother to them, giving them gifts. One of these young women, Pombinha, shares a particularly close relationship with Léonie. Whenever she visits, she greets Pombinha with

great physical affection, “kissing her lips and eyes repeatedly,” while commenting on her beauty (142). Pombinha “is the attractive daughter of a former socialite whose wealthy husband had committed suicide after going bankrupt” (Sedycias 34). Because of her upbringing, she is educated and has good manners—attributes that set her apart from the rest of the girls of the *cortiço*. While beautiful, her health is delicate:

A filha era a flor do cortiço. Chamavam-lhe Pombinha. Bonita, posto que enfermeira e nervosa ao último ponto; loura, muito pálida, com uns modos de menina de boa família. (39)

At eighteen years of age, she still has not begun to menstruate: “Pombinha, orçando alias pelos dezoito anos, não tinha ainda pago à natureza o cruento tributo da puberdade [...]” (39). Due to her physical immaturity and sheltered upbringing, Pombinha is rather naïve.

One day, Dona Isabel and Pombinha accept an invitation to visit Léonie at her home in the city. Brown’s translation summarizes the entirety of the visit in the following paragraph:

The visit to Leonie had not proved satisfactory. The hugging and kissing of the cocotte grated on the sensibilities of the young girl, and she was glad when they had started homeward. The French woman had slipped on her finger a ring with a diamond surrounded by little pearls, a gift which Pombinha firmly refused, finally accepting it only at Doña Isabel’s insistence. (178)

In contrast to the previous scene, Léonie’s affection here upsets Pombinha, even when she gives her a diamond ring. In *A Brazilian Tenement*, there is no explanation as to what causes this change in Pombinha’s demeanor. Reminiscent of what Scott-Bucleuch does to

Dom Casmurro, Brown entirely cuts out a scene that constitutes nearly half the chapter. After the mother and daughter arrive, Léonie sits next to Pombinha, “bem juntinho da outra, tomando-lhe as mãos, fazendo-lhe uma infinidade de perguntas, e pedindo-lhe beijos, que saboreava gemendo, de olhos fechados” (118). The mother, overwhelmed by the splendor and luxury of the home, seems not to notice, and soon falls asleep after drinking too much wine. At this moment, Léonie advances on the young woman:

—Vem cá, minha flor!... disse-lhe, puxando-a contra si e deixando-se cair sobre um diva. Sabes? Eu te quero cada vez mais!... Estou louca por ti!

E devorava-a de beijos violentos, repetidos, quentes, que sufocavam a menina, enchendo-a de espanto e de um instintivo temor, cuja origem a pobrezinha, na sua simplicidade, não podia saber qual era. [...]

E apesar dos protestos, das súplicas e até das lágrimas da infeliz, [Léonie] arrancou-lhe a última vestimenta, e precipitou-se contra ela, a beijar-lhe todo o corpo, a empolgar-lhe com os lábios o róseo bico do peito. (119)

Pombinha protests her advances, but Léonie continues to seduce the young woman. In spite of Pombinha’s naïveté, she retains a sense of right and wrong, at least in regards to her survival instinct and self-preservation. Nevertheless, she “is susceptible to the debilitating influence of environmental forces and internal drives which she can neither control nor understand” (Sedycias 43). Pombinha eventually succumbs to the Léonie’s sexual advances. The prostitute, in essence, rapes the young woman. Pombinha’s first sexual experience, coupled

with her first menstruation, depicted in the following scene, awakens her latent sexuality.

In *A Brazilian Tenement*, Brown abridges this entire scene to a few short lines: “The hugging and kissing of the cocotte grated on the sensibilities of the young girl.” Returning to the opening of the scene, Brown’s translation reads: “The visit to Leonie had not proved satisfactory.” This rendering minimizes the intense and impactful nature of this experience when compared to the original: “O passeio à casa de Léonie fizera-lhe muito mal. Trouxe de lá impressões de íntimos vexames, que nunca mais se apagariam por toda a sua vida” (118). Brown’s abridgement consequently strips away the tension of the original scene, so pivotal to Pombinha’s character development. Sonia Brayner traces the evolution of Pombinha’s sexuality, from innocence to depravity:

Pombinha é marcada inicialmente pela imagem sexual da interdição em que a repressão dos institutos e a virgindade estão mais intensamente codificadas. A ausência de menstruação é a oposição básica à promiscuidade do conjunto. O contato com o mal—Léonie, a cena de lesbianismo e conseqüente menstruação—liberam-na para a participação até então proibida: casamento, amantes, prostituição. (86–87)

Pombinha soon understands the power of seduction and control she can affect on men. Although she marries, after two years she returns to Léonie and enters a life of prostitution. Without the details of the lesbian encounter, however, the following line does not carry the same weight as it does in the original: “[Pombinha] was living with Leonie—the serpent

had conquered at last, and the tenement flower was in full bloom” (307). Although the reader can read between the lines and speculate, Brown’s edited translation effectively limits the reader’s ability to fully understand the nature of the relationship that exists between the two prostitutes, between women and men in urban Rio de Janeiro of this period, and also the place of women in the socio-economic structure of nineteenth-century Brazil.

In summation, *The Brazilian Tenement* attempts to remain faithful to the spirit of the original, and for the most part, it succeeds in portraying the underlying principles of Naturalism. Nevertheless, because of the “squeamish sensibilities of our reading public” Brown removes several sections that detail Pombinha’s maturation and sexual awakening. Consequently, the translation mutes Azevedo’s voice in his critique of sexual and economic mores in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro. Sedycias addresses the issues of these omissions:

We can only surmise that the translator, Harry W. Brown, either felt that these passages might prove offensive to an American audience and should not appear in his English version, or he was merely following instructions from his editor regarding what should be included or bowdlerized from the original text. (58)

Brown’s comments suggest that it was an editorial decision, based on his initial intention to produce “a faithful translation of the Portuguese original.” Nevertheless, such discussion is inconsequential since the fact remains that this “failed” translation was the only version available to English-language readers until David H. Rosenthal’s translation, *The*

Slum, appeared in 2000. For over seventy years, *A Brazilian Tenement*, an incomplete and deficient text, was the only translation to which English readers could turn.

Eroticizing *Macunaíma*

Whereas *The Brazilian Tenement* grossly diminishes the presence of human sexuality, especially in the character of Pombinha, E. A. Goodland's English translation of Mário de Andrade's *Macunaíma* (1928, trans. 1984) overemphasizes the libidinous qualities of the protagonist. The translator worked in close collaboration with Andrade's nephew, in which they "examined together the letter and spirit of every line in the first half of the book." He also consulted several Brazilians who possessed a "deep knowledge of the text" and an "extensive command of English" to ensure the fidelity of his translation. In spite of these efforts, Goodland frequently mistranslates several key phrases calling more attention to the erotic moments, thus distorting the original.

Throughout *Macunaíma*, the hero exclaims, "Ai! que preguiça..." which roughly translates to "Oh! What sloth" or "Oh! So lazy." This phrase, a basic motif of the text, key to its proper understanding, is a bilingual pun that combines aspects of both the Tupi and Portuguese languages, as Wasserman explains:

In Portuguese the first word, *ai*, is an exclamation, yet it is also the Indian word for the three-toed sloth, an animal names for its very slow movements. Considering *Macunaíma*'s laziness, the pun becomes clear. (363)

By combining the Tupi and Portuguese words, in Fonseca's estimation, Mário de Andrade "pretende retratar, na mestiçagem lingüística e na sonoridade musical, mais um traço de nacionalidade." Therefore, this linguistic amalgamation is not simply the personal interjection of the story's hero, but a phrase that encapsulates the cultural hybridity found in Brazilian Portuguese. She continues:

Desabafo-chave do herói Macunaíma, a expressão parece, à primeira vista, encerrar-se em si mesma, como assinalam diversos autores. Entretanto, há razões para conjecturar que, ao cunhá-la, Mário de Andrade teve motivações mais complexas, ligadas a seu interesse pelas manifestações do caráter nacional na língua. [...] A sonoridade chama a atenção: Aig Preguiça. [...] (qtd. in Andrade 6)

Macunaíma, as the "herói de nossa gente," serves as a representative of "Brazilianness." He utters this phrase when "he has been offered help or an opportunity to improve his situation—he even says it at times when he is invited to have sex." On one hand, the refrain characterizes the hero as "dedicated to the pleasure of doing nothing," which is "portrayed in the novel as a positive trait" (363). On the other hand, it also serves as an explanation as to "why Brazil has not reached the level of material development of England or the United States, whose people deplore laziness" (363). Goodland's translation renders "Ai! que preguiça..." as "Oh! What a fucking life!" which, according to Wasserman, "hints at the sexual appetites of the hero, but loses the other connotations." Goodland fatally, and crudely, reduces the multiple linguistic and cultural

connotations and overemphasizes the playfully erotic component of Macunaíma's character.

Another problem of translation surfaces with Andrade's use of the word "brincar" ("to play") as a euphemism for lovemaking. In Portuguese, as Wasserman points out, "brincar" does not carry "the erotic connotation, which is given entirely by the context" (363). She continues:

The translator chose the literal and somewhat technical "making love" for the playful and metaphorical "play," and lost Andrade's freedom with language, as well as the lack of solemnity with which Macunaíma approaches the erotic. (363)

Consequently, Goodland's mistranslation misrepresents the erotic and sexual element of the novel and downplays the lighthearted, humorous, and slightly mischievous usage of "brincar" found in the original, and central to it. Early in the novel, Macunaíma "plays" with his brother's wife in the forest. The language of the original is very playful, presenting an almost childlike and enchanting atmosphere. Goodland, in contrast, eroticizes the encounter and intensifies the sexual tone of the original:

No outro dia pediu pra Sofará que levasse ele passear e ficaram no mato até a boca-da-noite. Nem bem o menino tocou no folhço e virou num príncipe fegoso. Brincaram. Depois de bricarem três feitas, correram mato fora fazendo festinhas um pro outro. Depois das festinhas de cotucar, fizeram a das cócegas, depois se enterraram na areia, depois se queimaram com fogo de palha, isso foram muitas festinhas. [...] Quando a moça chegou também no tope eles brincaram outra vez balanceando no céu. Depois de brincarem Macunaíma quis fazer uma festa em Sofará. [...] Ela pulou do galho e juque! tombou sentada na barriga do herói que a envolveu com o corpo todo, uivando de prazer. E brincaram mais outra vez. (12-13)

The very next day he pestered Sofará to take him for a walk, and they dallied in the bush until nightfall. The little boy had no sooner touched the foliage than he was transformed into a prince burning with ardor. They made love. They made love again. They made love three times, then ran deeper into the forest to rouse themselves into the mood for more. After working each other up with nudging and tickling, they buried themselves in sand and scorched their bodies with a quick fire of straw—a very stimulating treatment. [...] when the girl reached the top they made love again, swinging in great arcs across the sky. This thrilling movement made Macunaíma desire a downright orgy with Sofará. [...] She leaped from the branch and landed astride the hero's belly with a great crash. He wrapped his body around hers, and howling with relish, they made love again. (6–7)

Certainly, there is a great deal of sensuality present in this encounter between Macunaíma and his sister-in-law. They “play” a number of times. They perform acts, such as burying themselves in sand and burning themselves, as a type of foreplay. Nevertheless, the tone of the original is that of two young people playing, tickling, and nudging one another in the forest. The tone is not overtly or explicitly sexual, even though there is an underlying eroticism in the scene.

In addition to the literal rendering of “brincar,” Goodland translates another euphemism, “fazer festinha,” and derivations thereof, as the following: “to rouse themselves into the mood for more,” “a very stimulating treatment,” and “desire a downright orgy.” By eroticizing this phrase, Goodland stripes away much of the carefree spirit of the original. The phrase, “fazer festinha,” first appears in the opening scene that mixes a sense of playfulness with the ambiguous sensuality:

No mucambo si alguma cunhatã se aproximava dele pra fazer festinha, Macunaíma punha a mão nas graças dela, cunhatã se afastava (6).

In the hut, if one of the girls came to cuddle him, he'd put out his hand to fondle her charms and the girl would run away. (3)

Lopez explains, “fazer festinha,” means “mostrar afeto sem contato físico” (7). In essence, it is a form of good-natured teasing akin to tickling. In this instance, Goodland renders the phrase as “to cuddle,” a loving, yet innocuous act, thus preserving the tone of the original. This scene also introduces Macunaíma’s unchecked libido, but Andrade uses “fazer festinha” euphemistically throughout the novel.

Andrade certainly presents an underlying, although sometimes ambiguous, sensuality in *Macunaíma*. Goodland’s translation, however, overemphasizes the eroticism found in the original, and so substantially alters the original text, a classic of Modern Brazilian literature. By mistranslating phrases, such as, “Ai! que preguiça,” “brincar,” and “fazer festinha,” the English translation of *Macunaíma* essentially converts playful physical interactions into erotically charged sexual encounters, thus misrepresenting the original text and leading the English reader badly astray. At this date, Goodland’s version is the only available English translation. As a result, scholars and students interested in studying Brazilian Modernism, especially within an inter-American context, only have access to a deeply flawed text that misconstrues and distorts the original.

Mistranslating *Grande sertão: veredas* into Oblivion

The work of Brazilian Modernist João Guimarães Rosa came to the attention of Alfred Knopf via Harriet de Onís, the accomplished Spanish translator. She considered Rosa to be in the same class as William Faulkner and Brazilian critics considered *Grande sertão: veredas* the local equivalent of Joyce's *Ulysses* since Rosa's work not only "defied all traditional patterns, but it had literally revealed new possibilities for the Portuguese language" (Rostagno 43). Rodríguez Monegal, adds that "Guimarães succeeded in completely revolutionizing the style and diction of twentieth-century [Brazilian] narrative" (677). Fully aware of all the great writers in Spanish and Portuguese, he declares that Guimarães Rosa is "beyond dispute Latin America's greatest novelist" (*Borzoj* 679). Juan Rulfo, who had a profound interest in Brazilian letters, commented, "Sobresale Guimarães. Era de una inventiva y una originalidad bárbaras [...]" (*Inframundo* 9). Guimarães arrived at the US literary scene at an opportune moment, because he "had broken with traditional regionalism and could compete on an equal footing with American novelists of the sixties" (Rostagno 42). Rostagno continues:

Like them, he favored fantasy rather than mimesis in fiction. His work also shared a comparable compulsion for playfulness in exploiting the disjunction between language and reality. And yet with all these marks of modernity and sophistication in his favor, Rosa found little but disappointment in his United States publishing fortunes. (42)

As Knopf prepared to publish *Grande sertão: veredas* in English, Rabassa warned him that translating Rosa would be difficult due to the fact that his brilliance was at least on par, if not greater, than that of Borges. When Harriet de Onís fell ill and could not complete the translation, she and Knopf called upon the Brazilian Portuguese lexicologist and Stanford professor, James L. Taylor, who had just finished Jorge Amado's highly successful *Gabriela, Clove, and Cinnamon*. By all accounts, Rosa was in the best professional hands to transfer his masterpiece into the English language.⁹ In spite of the concerted effort, *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands* received a tepid reception in 1963. One of the more perceptive reviews appeared in the *New York Times Book Review* from William Grossman. He acknowledges the relationship between the "unique style" and the "substance" of the novel. He expresses sympathy toward the translators in their prodigious task, but suggests they "might have tried to devise an English style as close to that of Rosa's Portuguese as possible." Instead, he observes, they chose "to employ a conventional style, with the result that much of the color is drained from the book" (27). In Levine's opinion, the English translation "levels the eccentric innovations of the avant-garde Brazilian Guimarães Rosa into a simple prose" ("Latin American Novel" 301).

⁹ Levine, however, notes the following regarding de Onís: "she was not terribly accurate and tended to normalize (with flowery language) both the regionalisms of some novels, and the original experimental language of others" ("Latin American Novel" 301).

Not all the blame lands squarely on the shoulders of the translators. Piers Armstrong argues that Rosa used his diplomatic experience to oversee the translation process into Italian, French, English, and German. (For some unexplained reason Armstrong excludes the Spanish translation from his study.) In his comparative study, Armstrong presents convincing evidence that Rosa pitted the translators against one another, fostering competition, in order to produce better translations. As an example, Rosa told de Onís that she and Taylor had produced a translation that could be appreciated by a greater number of readers with “muito maior fluidez, fluência, transparência e velocidade.” When speaking to the German translator, however, he said the following about the English translation: “O livro Americano está cheio dessas falhas, e ainda mais fundas alterações, enfraquecimentos, omissões, cortes. Basta compará-lo com o original, em qualquer página” (qtd. in Armstrong, 69). The problem is that Rosa, Knopf, and the translators employed a reader-friendly strategy, “recasting the [Brazilian] backlands context in an American analog” (72). According to Armstrong, they massaged “the quirky elliptical Rosean syntax [...] into a more mundane normality. The stream of long paragraphs is broken up. Further, some phrases and passages are simply omitted” (72).¹⁰ Therefore, the errors in style and tone were deliberate and not due to incompetence. The strategy

¹⁰ As just one example, Rodríguez Monegal includes, “The Slaughter of the Ponies,” in his *Borzoi Anthology*, a passage that was eliminated from the English translation (683–686).

was “to minimize foreignness and culturally transpose the material into a context recognizable and familiar to the reader in the target culture” (“Guimarães Rosa in Translation” 74). The result, however, was an existential western that neither connected nor resonated with the American reader.

On the surface, *Grande sertão: veredas* is a meandering monologue between Riobaldo, a retired *jagunço* (a hired gun of the backlands), and an unnamed interlocutor, *o senhor*—perhaps Rosa or the reader. Rodríguez Monegal offers the following summary of the scope and style of Riobaldo’s narrative:

[I]nstead of adopting a conventional, colloquial style of speech and presenting events in a more or less orderly sequence (as would be characteristic, say, of a narrator in regionalist fiction), Riobaldo constantly deforms words to suit his mood or purpose, leaves sentences unfinished, and throughout makes continual detours, and twists and turns backward and forward. His ceaseless telling and retelling of essentially the same story, without ever quite giving away the key to the mystery he is unraveling, exerts a hypnotic effect on his listener (and reader).

The main motifs Riobaldo explores are “the primeval search for the father, diabolical temptation, frustrated eroticism,” as well as the great ontological search for self and meaning in life (*Borzoi* 678). Lowe and Fitz suggest that the key motif, one that encompasses all others, can be summarized in a concept Riobaldo repeats throughout: in the sertão “tudo é e não é.” Rosa weaves the complexities and ambiguities of these themes with an intricately intertwined language:

Riobaldo's probing, self-conscious narrative ebbs and flows and surges like a great river, casting up a welter of radically different speech registers, neologisms, deformed words, ordinary words used in unusual ways, great swaths of poetic prose, and long, sinuous sentences deliberately left uncompleted. (Lowe and Fitz 55)

A brief analysis of a well-known passage will reveal this unique blend of form and content. Comparing this section with the English translation will also demonstrate the extent to which the translators watered down the brilliance of the original.

[S]e arrepare: pois, num chão, e com igual formato de ramos e folhas, não dá a mandioca mansa, que se come comum, e a mandioca-brava, que mata? Agora, o senhor já viu uma estranhez? A mandioca doce pode de repente virar azangada—motivos não sei; às vezes e diz que é por replantada no terreno sempre, com mudas seguidas, de manaíbas—vai em amargando, de tanto em tanto, de si mesma toma peçonhas. E ora veja: a outra, a mandioca-brava, também é que às vezes pode ficar mansa, a esmo, de se comer sem nenhum mal. (27)

Look here: in the same ground, and with branches and leaves of the same shape, doesn't the sweet cassava, which we eat, grow and the bitter cassava, which kills? Now the strange thing is that the sweet cassava can turn poisonous—why, I don't know. Some say it is from being replanted over and over in the same soil, from cuttings—it grows more and more bitter and then poisonous. But the other, the bitter cassava, sometimes changes too, and for no reason turns sweet and edible. (6)

Perhaps the most striking and noticeable difference between the original and the translation is the simplified lexicon the translators employ.

The first phrase, from the verb “arreparar-se,” is an archaism of “reparar,” which means “to take notice.” Apparently, this form is still used in mirandês, a Romance language belonging to the Astur-Leonese

linguistic group, spoken in a small area of northeastern Portugal. Throughout this passage, Guimarães refers to the nature of the cassava, differentiating between “mansa” and “brava,” which corresponds to “tame” and “wild.” He only mentions “doce” once. Yet, the translators only use “sweet” and “bitter.” One considerable challenge throughout the novel is translating “o senhor,” the formal address of the second person that takes on the third person singular conjugation. The title “sir” is the closest approximation, but, in mid-twentieth-century American English, one could not use “sir” interchangeably with “you.” Nevertheless, the translators completely omit the phrase, “Agora, o senhor já viu uma estranhez?,” by combining the last part of this phrase with the beginning of the following: “Now the strange thing is [...].” The word “azangada,” rendered as “poisonous,” is a neologism of “zangada,” which means angry or upset. A better option for the phrase could be “The sweet cassava can suddenly turn on you,” thus retaining both the sense of getting mad or upset and converting from one state to another. This kind of word play does not always translate directly, but by choosing “turn poisonous” the translators reduce the double meaning found in the original. One challenging line, even in Portuguese, is “é por replantada no terreno sempre, com mudas seguidas, de manaíbas,” which is translated as “Some say it is from being replanted over and over in the same soil, from cuttings.” The word “mudas” presents a challenge in translating. “Mudas” are seedlings, small starter plants, usually grown in a nursery,

that are later planted in a permanent location. However, “com mudas seguidas” could also refer to frequently moving the plant. The complexity of the phrase continues with “manaíbas,” a word derived from Tupi in the early 1600s that means “pedaço do caule da mandioca usada para muda” (Houaiss). Even if Guimarães means “with frequent moves,” by using “manaíbas” he subtly refers to the second, underlying meaning of “mudas.” This pairing of two seemingly unimportant botanical terms exemplifies the constant wordplay, neologism, and subversive syntax found throughout *Grande sertão: veredas*. Finally, other phrases in this passage that reflect Rosa’s singular style are “vai em amargando,” “peçonhas,” and “a esmo.” The first is simply a colloquial form of “vai se amargando,” a gerund of the reflexive verb. “Peçonhas,” means venom, a key lexical detail also lost in the English. Finally, “a esmo” is an equivalent of “à toa,” which means off course or aimless, a drifting motion not conveyed in the English translation.

By simplifying the robust lexicon and rhizomatic syntax, the translators impede the reader’s ability to access the deeper messages imbedded in the ambiguous, meandering text. *Devil to Pay in the Backlands* suppresses the technical and linguistic experimentation while stripping away much of the intertwined and interrelated motifs that make “*Grande sertão: veredas* one of the most complex works of fiction ever produced in Latin America” (Rodríguez Monegal, *Borzois* 678). The English translation, in stark contrast to the German, French, and Italian,

received a tepid and disappointing reaction. Consequently, Guimarães Rosa, one of the best novelists of the Americas, is unknown in the United States. *Grande sertão: veredas* is “a landmark text in the history of the novel [...] crying out for a new translation” (Lowe and Fitz 56).

The Brazilian Tenement, *Macunaíma*, and *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands* represent a larger body of poorly translated Brazilian texts. The more troubling reality, however, is the dearth of English translations of even canonical Brazilian texts, not to mention the peripheral or marginal works of Brazilian literature. To rectify this problem, the Library of Latin America series at Oxford University Press is in the process of making available “major nineteenth-century authors whose work has been neglected in the English-speaking world” (Franco vii). Currently, eight of the twenty-eight titles listed on their website are from Brazil, a laudable representation.¹¹ Nevertheless, many of these are retranslations of works that have already appeared in English. Publishers and translators of Brazilian literature in English face the daunting task of revisiting the extant catalogue and correcting flawed or “failed” translations before they can consider translating secondary,

¹¹ These titles include, in order of original publication date: *Memoirs of a Militia Sergeant* (Manuel Antônio de Almeida, 1855; trans. Ronald W. Sousa, 1999), *Iracema* (José de Alencar, 1865; trans. Clifford E. Landers, 2000), *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* (Machado de Assis, 1881; trans. Gregory Rabassa, 1998), *The Slum* (Aluísio Azevedo, 1890; trans. David H. Rosenthal, 2000), *Quincas Borba* (Machado de Assis, 1891; trans. Gregory Rabassa, 1999), *Dom Casmurro* (Machado de Assis, 1899; trans. John Gledson, 1998), *Esau and Jacob* (Machado de Assis, 1904; trans. Elizabeth Lowe, 2000), *Chapters of Brazil's Colonial History 1500–1800* (João Capistrano de Abreu, 1907; trans. Arthur Brakel, 1998). Only *Chapters of Brazil's Colonial History* has not appeared in English translation before.

marginal, or peripheral titles. The general paucity of translations, in general, along with the veritable ignorance of Brazil beyond its borders, has resulted in a grossly neglected and underrepresented reception.

Translation and Inter-American Literary Studies

In this dissertation, I have limited the scope of my study to the reception and influence of Spanish American and Brazilian literature, in English translation, by US authors and critics. This project conforms to one of the comparative models Fitz establishes:

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 lends themselves naturally to a two-sided study. (Fitz, "Faulkner" 29).

It is my hope that this study will provide a methodological and theoretical approach that others can apply to a number of literary traditions. The field of inter-American studies, however, allows for a broader approach that expands beyond the limits of literature. In a landmark essay, "In Quest of 'Nuestras Américas,'" in which he outlines and describes this emergent field, Fitz offers a definition that encompasses multiple facets:

Crossing borders and boundaries in ways that increasingly integrate even such historically separate disciplines as the humanities, the social sciences, law, engineering, and medicine, inter-American Studies allows us to displace our

traditional and very restrictive understanding of the term “American” with a nomenclature and a methodology that include all the cultures and nations of the New World. (1)

By expanding the definition of “American,” the field of inter-American studies seeks “to permit the inclusion of the other New World nations and redirect it toward a North/South configuration, without, however, abandoning either our European or our African heritages” (3). The field of inter-American studies, by its very nature, crosses national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Transdisciplinary approaches that treat the intersections between national cultural developments serve to overcome what Sophia A. McClennen calls “the pitfalls of disciplinary insularity” (105). She declares:

[I]f the humanities are to survive, then we must find a way to strengthen the ties across humanistic disciplines and also between the humanities and the social sciences. Collaborative scholarship and intellectual exchange will help challenge the academic division of labor that threatens the future of the humanities. (105)

While my dissertation focuses solely on canonical Latin American texts, there is no reason why one could not consider peripheral and marginal literatures in a similar study. In fact, one need not limit the study of translation in reception and influence to literature. One could apply a similar methodological approach to a number of fields. A hallmark of a strong inter-American study, even if it focuses on one specific field or tradition, is its applicability to related disciplines.

Moreover, I have strived to follow the comparative method that, if properly applied, “accommodates and honors difference but without

homogenizing or minimizing it” (5). In this way, I have shown the points of contact and departure in the role of translation in the reception and influence of Borges, Neruda, and Machado in the United States, observations that also apply generally to Spanish American and Brazilian literature. As inter-American literature study develops, Latin American authors will increasingly depend on their translators to produce high-quality and reliable translations. We have seen how both successful and “failed” translations affect the reception and influence of a given author or even an entire literary tradition. While a number of factors influence this process, the fact remains that bad translations severely decrease the probability of a positive reception. No matter the quality, a translation is never “an exact reproduction of the original upon which it is based.” As Fitz recommends, “we should always be alert to the inevitable changes that occur in the act of translation, the inescapable process of loss and gain that characterizes even the best translations” (“Quest” 10). The comparatist, trained in multiple languages and traditions, is able “to explain both what is lost and what is gained in translations between the distinct value systems of different cultures, media, disciplines, and institutions” (Burnheimer 44).

One of the key points of this dissertation is that students and scholars involved in the inter-American project will, for the most part, read Spanish American and Brazilian literature, not in the original language, but in English translation. While some critics, such as Levin

and Greene, condemn the practice of reading foreign literatures in translation, others recommend more use of translated texts in comparative courses, as stated in the Bernheimer Report:

While the necessity and unique benefits of a deep knowledge of foreign languages must continue to be stressed, the old hostilities toward translation should be mitigated. In fact, translation can well be seen as a paradigm for larger problems of understanding and interpretation across different discursive traditions. (44)

Fitz reminds us, however, “the scholar who would rely exclusively on the translated text should always exercise extreme caution in making stylistic comments about it.” Yet, he also supports the recommendations of the Bernheimer Report:

At the same time, there is no doubt that inter-American literature, like Comparative Literature itself, will find that translation continues to serve, oft times aiding and abetting intense language study, as a major part of its attractiveness and success. The two are not incompatible, and the savvy scholar will find a way to wave them together in a mutually beneficial way. (“Quest” 10)

Consequently, these non-speakers of Spanish and Portuguese, mostly housed in English departments and in American Studies programs, will need guidance about which translated versions of these writers they should read. For this reason, scholars of Spanish and Portuguese are the natural leaders in the inter-American project since they not only know the traditions of their respective fields, they also speak English and many even know French, which is vital when including the literature of Québec and of the Caribbean. Suzanne Jill Levine reminds us that this North/South dialogue depends on the mediating force of translation:

North American readers need to hear the voices of that “other” America alienated from the United States by a torturous political history. But these readers also need to understand *how* Latin American writing is transmitted to them, and *how* differences and similarities between cultures and languages affect *what* is finally transmitted. Knowing the other and how we receive or hear the other is a fundamental step toward knowing ourselves. (*Scribe*, xiv-xv)

One of the central goals of inter-American literature is not only to recognize prominent canonical figures overlooked in US academia, but also to give voice to the marginalized and disenfranchised. Again, recognizing and respecting differences—so vital to comparative studies—will bring greater understanding and mutual respect in this cross-cultural inter-American exchange.

Finally, as Latin Americanists trained in both Spanish American and Brazilian traditions lead the vanguard of inter-American studies, we will see more and better translations of Brazilian letters used across a gamut of disciplines. The burgeoning field of inter-American literature is just one way in which Brazilianists can promote their field and bring higher visibility to writers like Machado de Assis, Guimarães Rosa, Clarice Lispector, Nélide Piñon, and Regina Rheda, among others. As a point of conclusion, I echo Earl Fitz’s rallying cry:

The responsibility really lies with us. Long accustomed to measuring our texts against those from other literary cultures, we are uniquely prepared, in terms of our critical methods and perspectives, to move our writers into areas of prominence and to assert their excellence in the international arena. We have long known that the literature of Portuguese expression has much to offer the rest of the world, and now, finally, the time seems right for us to begin,

to make our presence known. Let us seize the moment!
("Internationalizing" 447)

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