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The efficient scribe: translating Julio Cortázar's *Todos los fuegos el fuego*

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ABSTRACT

American scholar and literary translator Suzanne Jill Levine's seminal monograph, *The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction* (1991), furnishes prime examples of her active role during the co-translation of works by subversive, creative authors like the Cuban-British writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante. The intention of this article is to discuss another type of collaborative translation by focusing on her working relationship with the Argentinian author Julio Cortázar during the translation process of his collection of short stories *Todos los fuegos el fuego* (1966; *All Fires the Fire and Other Stories*, 1973). An exploration of Cortázar's working life as a translator reveals that he was far from being a playful author, willing to perform a 'creative self-betrayal' of his volume of short stories, and that his understanding of original text and translation defined his collaboration with Levine. An analysis of his correspondence with her, including the examination of mistakes that had been highlighted by Cortázar, and of her incorporation of corresponding amendments in her final version aims to prove that Levine translated his short stories as a non-subversive and efficient scribe, guided by Cortázar's controlled cooperation and with his interference disguised as assistance.

KEYWORDS

Julio Cortázar; susanne Jill Levine; collaborative translation; interference

American scholar and literary translator Suzanne Jill Levine's *The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction* (1991) is not an overview of experiences in a translator's professional life.¹ Having rendered works by most noteworthy Spanish-speaking authors – Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges, Mexican Carlos Fuentes, and Chilean José Donoso, to name a few – Levine selects her experiences judiciously. She depicts her specific collaborative translation with three exiled authors whom she brands as doubly subversive, politically and creatively (iii): Cubans Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Severo Sarduy and Argentinian Manuel Puig. Impinged upon by their subversive requests or 'the playful, creative possibility of self-betrayal, of re-creating (in) language' (182) their own works, Levine found herself unshackled from the traditional role of the 'servile, nameless scribe' (7), who is only tasked with the faithful translation of the original text. Whilst sealing a lifelong friendship with them, she was transformed into a subversive scribe, fully partaking in the translation of their provocative, ambiguous, and witty rhetoric. Thus, Levine's monograph abounds in

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memorable passages, including amusing snippets from personal correspondence with Cabrera Infante, who, in conceiving translation as his 'original's creative process' (167), worked side by side with Levine, both indulging in the clarification of meaning and the negotiation of wordplay and punning. In one such passage, Levine examines letters exchanged with him in May 1970, during their subversive co-translation or 'closelaboration', as Cabrera Infante coined it, of *Tres tristes tigres* (1964/1967; *Three Trapped Tigers*, 1971), and explains how they broached literary parodies of celebrated Latin American writers. By way of example, Argentinian Julio Cortázar's opening phrase of his ground-breaking novel, *Rayuela* (1963) (*Hopscotch*, 1966), '¿Encontraría a La Maga?' (Would he find La Maga?; Cortázar 1963/2004, 11)² – alluding to Cortázar's alter ego, metaphysical thinker, Horacio Oliveira,³ wondering about the whereabouts of his child-like ingenious lover, 'the Magician' –, turns into Cabrera Infante and Levine's down-to-earth caricature: "¿Encontraría la Manga? (Would he find his Sleeve?), thanks to a felicitous pun in Spanish; 'Maga [magician] and Manga [sleeve] being dangerously similar' (Levine 1991/2009, 95). Little did Levine know at the time that, two years later, she would be translating for Cortázar.

In the summer of 1972, just after having completed *Three Trapped Tigers* and Puig's *La traición de Rita Hayworth* (1968, *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth*, 1971), a young Levine rendered Cortázar's collection of short stories, *Todos los fuegos el fuego* (1966; *All Fires the Fire and Other Stories*, 1973). She would never translate any more of his texts and her allusions to Cortázar in *The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction* are scattered and irrelevant; that is, exempt of details of her work for him as a translator. One might feel tempted to speculate as to why this is so, and for that matter, whether or not the same reasons would apply to her decision to preclude references to many other renowned writers whose work she also translated. The intention of this article, nevertheless, is to focus on Cortázar's case. Departing from suppositions, it sheds light on their working relationship by falling back upon Cortázar's published epistolary work, more specifically, on three letters he sent to Levine during June and July 1972.⁴ In analysing their content, this article seeks to discuss Levine's working conditions and address the alternative to the 'subversion' she describes in her monograph. After an examination of the breakdown of mistakes and amendments that he lists in his third letter, in particular, of those he produced for his favourite short story, 'Señorita Cora' ('Nurse Cora'), a comparison between Cortázar's suggestions and the final edition of Levine's translation will follow. Said juxtaposition aims to demonstrate how she observed Cortázar's instructions and respected his wish to preserve the meaning and the tone of his original text. In line with other studies that have investigated several models in the world of collaborative translation by factoring in degrees of assistance, interference, cooperation, and control,⁵ this essay focuses for the first time on Cortázar's specific relationship with Levine.⁶ It will reveal that, unlike Cabrera Infante, Cortázar was not a subversive writer – he was by no means a 'playful' author willing to perform a 'creative self-betrayal' of his original – and that it is this approach to his original volume of short stories and to translation that culminates in a distinct opposition between efficiency and subversion. Far from being released from the role of a 'servile scribe', Levine translated his collection as a non-subversive and efficient one, guided by Cortázar's controlled cooperation and with his interference disguised as assistance.

Understanding the letters: Cortázar as translator and proofreader of his translated work

For a correct interpretation of Cortázar's correspondence with Levine and the rationale behind his understanding of their roles, it is vital to sketch out his professional life, his take on his job as a translator and a writer, and his relationship with other translators. An established writer since the mid-1950s, Cortázar's suggestive self-definition of a translator who got into writing returns him to his formative years in Argentina (González Bermejo 1978, 18). It paints the portrait of a school teacher and aspiring poet who avidly reads, writes, and translates French and English literary texts for the cultural journal *Leoplán. Magazine Popular Argentino*. For over a decade, Cortázar would juggle a range of successive jobs – school teacher in Bolívar and Chivilcoy, lecturer of French and English literature at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo (1944–1946), and manager of the Cámara Argentina del Libro and sworn translator in Buenos Aires (1948–1951) – with the rendering of over 18 literary works of every genre (Standish 2001, xiv).⁷ As for his incipient literary career, Cortázar also refers to this 'writer-translator' tandem when confessing that he always found solace in translation. Tellingly, he advises 'a cualquier escritor joven que tiene dificultades de escritura' (any young writer who has difficulties to write) to overcome said shortcomings in this manner: 'que deje de escribir un tiempo [...] y que haga traducciones; que traduzca buena literatura, y un día se va a dar cuenta que él puede escribir con una soltura que no tenía antes' (they should stop writing for some time [...] and do translations. They should translate good literature, and one day they will realise that they can write with an ease that they did not have before; González Bermejo 1978, 19).

Upon his arrival in Paris in the autumn of 1951, Cortázar brought along signed contracts to resume his translations of 'good literature' – titles by contemporary authors like Marcel Aymé, Ladislav Dormandi, and Marguerite Yourcenar –, and received another major commission; the translation of essays and short stories by Edgar Allan Poe, one of his most influential writers. Financially speaking, he soon resigned himself to the certainty that literary translation was not for him. The only job that could provide both economic stability and free time for the writing of his own fiction was that of translator and proofreader of official documents at UNESCO. Only one year after setting up residence in Paris, he secured a position as a freelancer and, in 1956, he was offered a full-time permanent post. His rejection of this and, in turn, acceptance of commissions as a UNESCO freelancer until the early 1970s proves that Cortázar had chosen this post because it allowed him to compartmentalise his life as a writer. He and his then wife, Aurora Bernárdez, also a literary translator and freelancer at UNESCO, would usually work in Paris for around half a year and spend spring and summer in a 'ranchito', a cottage they bought in Saignon, a small village of the Provence-Alpes region.⁸ It is here that Cortázar would dedicate himself to his literary activities, whether reading, writing, amending final drafts, or revising final proofs of his works before submission to print.

Cortázar's experience as a translator and proofreader, aside from training him to write 'with ease' and allowing him to establish his working pace as a writer, defines the relationship he was to maintain with his translators. To begin with, he is mindful of the pitfalls involved in the performance of the job. In 'Translate, traduire, tradurre, traducir' (1995), the only essay that Cortázar wrote on translation, he is not unabashed to cite mistakes he had incurred when translating literature and lists a series of other amusing

errors he had encountered as reader of literature and proofreader, including the rendering of 'hormis' (except, in French) as 'hormiga' (ant, in Spanish) and 'scholarship' as 'un barco cargado de escolares' (a ship full of students). Cortázar states that 'all this has left me with an appreciation for the subtle transmigrations and transgressions' (1995/2002, 21) that take place during translation, an idea that he echoes in several of his interviews. For example, he recounts to Latin American literary critic, Sara Castro-Klarén, that upon reading translations: 'el conocimiento profesional de la técnica de la traducción hace que yo sea hipersensible a los macaneos del traductor; macaneos que conozco demasiado bien por cuan[t]o yo soy uno de los muchos que ha macaneado como traductor' (the professional knowledge of the translating technique makes me hypersensitive to the translator's mistakes; mistakes that I know far too well in that I am one of many who has made mistakes as a translator; Castro-Klarén 1980, 21). These 'macaneos' occur because, he asserts, '[n]o hay traductor perfecto' (there is no perfect translator); any one can fall for 'imperfecciones, los malentendidos, las pequeñas torpezas por falta de conocimiento del lenguaje oral o por un simple descuido' (imperfections, the misunderstandings, the small blunders due to lack of knowledge of oral language or to simple neglect; 9). From this vantage position, Cortázar is also adamant that, in his capacity as a proofreader, he can resolve problems of translation. In a round table with poets and intellectuals, including Nicaraguan Ernesto Cardenal, he comes across as a firm believer that, apart from identifying errors, 'empecinándose y siendo sensible' (insisting on and being sensitive), he can almost always find 'equivalencias que disminuyan la pérdida inevitable que hay en toda traducción' (equivalences that decrease the inevitable loss incurred in every translation; Cardenal et al. 1976). Cortázar appears as a fearful holder of his almighty source text, who wants his original to remain as uncompromised as possible and who, in ensuring that loss is minimised, is willing to volunteer his presence in the translation process.

Offering his services as skilful proofreader to his translators, without being perceived as an annoying interference, required the nurturing of a close bond and tact. Early proof of this surfaces in his correspondence with American poet Paul Blackburn. Cortázar befriended him over lengthy letters, in which they enclosed their own fiction and acted reciprocally as critics. Blackburn became his literary agent and first well-known translator of short stories into English, starting with *Historias de cronopios y de famas* (1962) (*Cronopios and Famas*, 1969). As former mutual readers of each other's work, Blackburn sent a series of queries and comments to Cortázar, who immediately felt the urge to intervene in his translation. 'Paul, si quisieras mandarme las traducciones antes de que se publiquen' (were you to send me your translations before they get published), Cortázar writes in a letter from June 1959, 'quizá sería útil que yo las leyera, a fin de ajustar cualquier cosa que pueda haberse pasado' (it would be perhaps useful if I read them so as to adjust anything that might have got lost; Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 2, 183). Maintaining an amicable tone, Cortázar even turns the tables, disguising his eagerness to supervise the draft for Blackburn's sake, as a favour: 'Esto te lo digo para tu tranquilidad, y para que sepas que no me molesta en absoluto colaborar contigo [...]. Muy al contrario' (I'm saying this for your own peace of mind, so that you know that collaborating with you doesn't bother me at all [...]. Quite the opposite; 183). What happened next confirms Cortázar's intention to have the final say on Blackburn's translation. Upon receipt of the final draft, Cortázar reviewed the work carefully, which resulted in many annotations on

the draft and a long list of comments – clarifications of meaning, suggestions, and corrections – for Blackburn to deal with before submission to print.⁹

Cortázar's interaction with Blackburn set the precedent upon which he built up his *modus operandi* with other translators, eventually lifelong friends; Gregory Rabassa, main translator into English of Cortázar's novels, and Laure Guille-Bataillon, translator of his work into French. Cortázar repeatedly relied on them because both possessed the necessary stamina to work at his pace and to accept his regimental conditions. Their routine, as had Cortázar's with Blackburn, involved the dispatch of drafts and the exchange of explanatory letters. Cortázar would spell out what he expected of their translations, inviting them to communicate any issue they experienced in the process, and at times advancing detailed lists of problems he envisaged and possible answers. To serve as an example, when Blackburn recommended Rabassa for the translation of *Rayuela*, Cortázar suggested that in preparation: 'I could split a copy, let's say 5 or 10 parts, mark the most dangerous spots, and send them one after the other to the translator [Rabassa], so he could begin his work having already 50 or 75 pages marked by me' (Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 2, 505 [original in English]). Finally, upon receipt of Rabassa's draft, likewise divided into batches, Cortázar would devote himself to a meticulous, painstaking task: the collation of his original with Rabassa's work, underlining and highlighting mistakes, clarifying terminology, and proposing other equivalences in the draft and in a letter. This same procedure would be applied to Rabassa's translation of his next novel, *62, modelo para armar* (1968) (*62: A Model Kit*, 1972), and to Blackburn's of his collection of short stories, such as *Las armas secretas* (1959, *Blow up and Other Stories*, 1968). In the comfort zone of this established working method with both friends, Cortázar assigned to Blackburn the translation of his next volume, *Todos los fuegos el fuego* (1966). However, upon Blackburn's unexpected death in 1971, Cortázar found himself under enormous pressure, possibly dreading that the work would fall into the hands of an unreliable translator. He had been in this situation before; during the translation of his novel *Los premios* (1960) (*The Prizes*, 1965), he had followed Blackburn's advice to hire a young translator who was unknown to him, Elaine Kerrigan, whose inability to meet deadlines and final translation had displeased Cortázar enormously.¹⁰ In these circumstances, Rabassa recommended appointing Levine, a former student of his at Columbia University, and although Cortázar may have been wary that Levine, like Kerrigan, would not deliver, he was soon proven wrong.

Working for Cortázar: Levine as an efficient scribe

Cortázar proofread Levine's translation of the eight short stories comprising *Todos los fuegos el fuego*, which she dispatched in three record-time rounds, at his 'ranchito' in the summer of 1972. It is not known whether, as intermediary, Rabassa had filled her in about Cortázar's working style or whether she had agreed with Cortázar on this specific split of batches. What is clear is that Cortázar's initial fears of commissioning a translator who would not abide by the rules dissipated at once. In the opening paragraph of his first letter, he acknowledges Levine's acquiescence to send her work for his supervision in this straightforward manner: 'me alegro mucho de que usted me envíe los borradores, pues no siempre ocurre así con algunos traductores que entienden de otra manera la relación que debe existir con el autor' (I am very glad that you send me the drafts as it does not

always happen with some translators who understand the relationship that must exist with the author differently; Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 4, 291). Cortázar, nevertheless, is quick to subdue any tone of enforcement, welcoming Levine's '*alternatives* [sic] y [...] preguntas' (and [...] questions; 291), that is, her annotation of different translation options, so that he can choose his preferred one, and questions that, also in his capacity as the author, he is able to answer. Lowering himself to the condition of proofreader upon whom Levine has to place her trust, he claims that he felt stimulated to work not so much for his own sake but, echoing his aforementioned words to Blackburn, in order to '*ayudarla [lo mejor posible] en su tarea*' (to help you [the best I can] in your task; 291). '*[S]epa desde ahora que encuentro muy bien su trabajo*' (you should know right away that I find your work very good), Cortázar flatters Levine, '*y que estoy muy feliz de que traduzca mis relatos*' (and that I am very happy that you are translating my short stories; 291–292).

Cortázar's demanding and rewarding approach developed in a month during which his letters, alongside copious enumerations of mistakes and amendments, interject praise for her hard work. Expressing fondness and an interest in befriending her, he asks for personal information and even celebrates, at the beginning of his third letter (27th July), that they finally address each other with an informal 'you'. '*Gracias por tutearme, tratamiento que te devuelvo con mucho placer*' (thanks for addressing me with an informal you, treatment that I return with a lot of pleasure), Cortázar writes in this sense, '*puesto que ya somos camaradas de trabajo*' (given that we are now working comrades; Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 4, 307). This is not a banal statement but a reassuring, reciprocal vote of confidence. Cortázar acknowledges Levine's professional work and, at the same time, seems to have a projection in mind, the security of having found in Levine a new reliable, diligent translator. Cortázar's recognition of her working standard is demonstrated in the fact that he did not request a final copy to verify she had amended her translation, urging her instead to send the final proofs to print (312). Furthermore, in what seems an clear attempt to recruit her as his new friend-translator, replacing Blackburn, Cortázar invited Levine to Saignon and proposed another immediate translation assignment.¹¹

Having placed the translation process of *Todos los fuegos el fuego* in its broader context, it is apt to examine how Levine had earned Cortázar's confidence and why he was right to trust her. In so doing, several passages exemplifying Cortázar's thorough revision of Levine's draft and Levine's faithful integration of his suggested amendments in the final proofs are next discussed. Special attention is paid to '*La señorita Cora*' ('Nurse Cora') as it was Cortázar's favourite short story and the one which he was most concerned to see translated well.¹² In reading her English version, Cortázar admits that it sounds '*muy bien [,] como todo lo que has hecho hasta ahora*' (very good [,] as everything you have done so far; Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 4, 308). Nonetheless, his desire to bring her translation as close as possible to his original resulted in his meticulous collation of source and target texts and, in turn, to an extended list of line-to-line corrections and comments for Levine, which he dispatched in his third letter. These can be classified into two groups; general annotations, similar to those he jotted down for other short stories, and specific ones, only found in connection with '*Nurse Cora*' and its inherent writing technique. To begin with general comments, Cortázar highlights lexicographical glitches, the '*macaneos*' that require his intervention as a native speaker. For example, when referring to the condition from which the young protagonist, infirm Pablo, is suffering, Levine had translated '*cólicos*' (cramping) as '*diarrhoea*'. Cortázar makes his case:

“Diarrh[o]ea” me inquieta, porque Pablo no se ha levantado todavía para ir al baño, y en español significaría que ha defecado en la cama, lo que no es exacto. “Cólicos” significa simplemente dolores, retortijones de vientre, necesidad de ir inmediatamente a evacuar. De ninguna manera cabe imaginar que alguien de la edad de Pablo tenga una diarrea en la cama.

[“Diarrhoea” worries me because Pablo has not got up yet to go to the toilet. In Spanish it means that he has defecated in bed, which is incorrect. “Cólicos” simply means pain, belly cramps, the need to go immediately to pass stool. By no means can one imagine that someone with Pablo’s age has diarrhoea in bed.] (Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 4, 309)

Cortázar’s contention is that one wrong word can potentially tamper with the real meaning of his original to the extent of making it sound incoherent and misrepresent the character’s actions and features. Levine, faithful to Cortázar’s clarification, opts to replace her former choice, ‘diarrhoea’, with ‘cramps’ in ‘a pesar de los *cólicos* me mordí las dos manos y lloré’ (Cortázar 1966/1995, 554); ‘despite the *cramps* I bit my hands and cried’ (Cortázar 1973, 74).¹³

Cortázar’s desire to retain his characters’ features in translation is likewise visible when he instructs Levine to notice that Nurse Cora is an inexperienced young woman, still unhardened by the toughness of her profession. Thus, when Levine presented him with a list of several alternatives to render an appellative he had applied to her; ‘potrilla’ – literally and figuratively meaning ‘filly’ –, he writes: ‘tu duda entre “filly”, etc. [...] Es [...] la idea de novata, novicia, [...] poco acostumbrada a la rutina de la profesión’ (your doubt about ‘filly’, etc. [...] It is [...] the idea of being a novice, a beginner, [...] very little used to the routine of her profession; Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 4, 310). Reassured by Cortázar’s explanation, Levine eventually translated anaesthesiologist Marcial’s invitation to Nurse Cora, ‘Vení, te voy a hacer un café bien fuerte, mirá que sos *potrilla* todavía, parece mentira’ (Cortázar 1966/1995, 561), as ‘Come, I’ll make you a nice strong cup of coffee, how *green* you still are, you should be ashamed of yourself’ (Cortázar 1973, 85). The final sentence ‘parece mentira’, rendered as ‘you should be ashamed of yourself’, had also constituted a matter of discussion. In her first draft, Levine had aptly translated ‘parece mentira’ as ‘it seems incredible’ but Cortázar took issue. For him, ‘it seems incredible’ must have read as another word-for-word translation that deviated from the original meaning he wanted to reproduce; the fact that Marcial does not intend to chastise young Nurse Cora for lack of professionalism. In order to direct Levine towards what he believed to be a more appropriate phrase, he explains: ‘[o]ralmente, [parece mentira] debería contener un reproche amistoso [...]; algo como “you should be ashamed” o algo así’ (orally, [the phrase ‘parece mentira’] should contain a friendly rebuke [...]; something like ‘you should be ashamed’ or something similar; Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 4, 310). Far from disagreeing with Cortázar’s wrong suggestion – as a non-native speaker he was not aware that ‘it seems incredible’ was right in this context and softens that sense of rebuke if compared to ‘you should be ashamed’ –, Levine substituted her first option (‘it seems incredible’) with ‘you should be ashamed’. Also to be noted is that her added emphasis (‘of yourself’) is at odds with Cortázar’s wish. Levine decided not to question his English and, possibly following Cortázar’s cue to make the dialogue sound realistic, her final revision of the translation ended up compromising the tone of the original he had insisted on maintaining.

This issue of delivering the right, original tone is a constant in Cortázar’s proofreading of Levine’s translation and appears, at times, inextricably intertwined with what he

terms as ‘perspectiva multiforme’ (multiform perspective), an innovative technique he had thoroughly applied to ‘Nurse Cora’. Defined by Cortázar as ‘pasajes, dentro de una misma frase, de un personaje a otro’ (changing the voices, within the same sentence, from one character onto another), he provides Levine with an example of use when noting that ‘hacia el final del cuento incluso en una sola frase se pasa por tres narradores diferentes (o puntos de vista diferentes)’ (at the end of the short story three different narrators (or different points of view) are interchanged in one single sentence; Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 4, 303). Cortázar had already warned Levine in his second letter (dated 5th July) that said technique would cause her trouble and, upon receipt of her draft, he puts himself to the conscientious task of checking, line by line, whether Levine had observed his instruction: ‘el lenguaje debe ser siempre *oral*, puesto que cada frase corresponde a algo que piensa o dice uno de los personajes’ (the language must always be *oral* because each sentence matches something one of the characters is thinking or saying; 308). Proving her efficiency, Levine paid careful attention to Cortázar’s brief because, when it comes to the confusion of grammatical subjects, Cortázar only finds a few mistakes in her draft. For example, in page 17, he points out that it is the surgeon, Dr Suárez, and not Pablo or his mother who speaks; in page 21, that it is Pablo and not Dr Suárez; and in page 23, that Nurse Cora is thinking, not maintaining a conversation with Marcial (309–310).

As for the ‘oral’ or colloquial tone of the original, Cortázar senses that, on some occasions, Levine has been ‘demasiado fiel al original’ (too faithful to the original) in that ‘los personajes dejan de hablar como hablarían personajes norteamericanos en una situación similar’ (characters stop talking as American characters would do in a similar situation; 308). Convinced that Levine is incurring the mistake of translating literally, as aforementioned, ‘por una falta de conocimiento del lenguaje oral’ (due to a lack of knowledge of oral language; Castro-Klarén 1980, 21), and perhaps unveiling to her the technique by which he had transferred sketches of dialogues into a written text, Cortázar encourages Levine to domesticate her draft in this manner: ‘No tengas miedo, Jill, en esos casos: di tu misma en voz alta lo que diría el personaje en inglés, y no vaciles en “oralizar” cuando sea necesario’ (Don’t be afraid, Jill, in these cases do say aloud what the character would say in English. Do not hesitate to ‘make it oral’ when it is necessary; Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 4, 308). A prime example of this appears in page 16 of Levine’s draft, where Cortázar notes that she had translated the phrase ‘la verdad’, literally, as ‘the truth’, instead of ‘to be honest’, as required in the context. This is Cortázar’s clarification: ‘Aquí tienes un ejemplo de lo que te decía al comienzo sobre la “oralidad”’ (Here you have an example of what I was saying about ‘orality’ at the beginning), Cortázar continues, ‘Cora dice: “No, la verdad, no tengo suerte, Marcial”, y esa expresión, “la verdad”, intercalada en la frase, le da un tono perfectamente hablado, espontáneo, en español’ (Cora says: ‘No, to be honest, I have no luck, Marcial’. The ‘la verdad’ expression, inserted in the sentence, gives it a perfect spoken, spontaneous tone; 309). Taking heed of Cortázar’s request, Levine would eventually render ‘No, la verdad, no tengo suerte, Marcial’ (Cortázar 1966/1995, 558) as ‘No, frankly, Marcial, I’m just not lucky’ (Cortázar 1973, 81).

Whilst the former example emerges as another ‘macaneo’, a mistake originating in a phrase that has been taken literally instead of metaphorically or in context, the next, final instance reconnects with another distinguishable characteristic of Cortázar as a writer; his expectation that his short story will fall into the hands of an engaged reader,

whom he names ‘lector cómplice’ (accomplice reader). Cortázar incorporated one of his most well-known definitions of such a reader in chapter 79 of *Rayuela*, when putting in the words of his fictional literary critic and novelist, Morelli, that they are ‘un camarada de camino [...], copartícipe y copadeciente de la experiencia por la que pasa el novelista, en el mismo momento y en la misma forma’ (a travelling comrade [...], co-partner and co-sufferer of the experience the novelist is undergoing, at the same time and in the same manner; Cortázar 1963/2004, 413). The act of reading should transport readers into the author’s own world, bring them closer to his own experiences and transform them into interpreters of his messages. Thus, a textual symbiosis occurs; the writer initiates a text that the active reader, who is able to decipher and reconstruct fragmented or unordered textual elements, finally completes.¹⁴ As one of his first readers of his source text, Cortázar demands Levine to become his accomplice reader and to render his ambiguous text into English. In this sense, not only should Levine ‘say aloud’ what characters would pronounce in real life but also be involved in the interpretation of the story, scrutinising as an incisive, critical reader, his inclusion of phrases that are invested with a meaningful silence. Page 21 of Levine’s draft supplies a clear example. Cortázar is disapproving of Levine’s translation of ‘Pero entonces, Marcial ...’ (But then Marcial ...) as ‘But Marcial’ (Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 4, 310) in: ‘No, señorita Cora, prefiero que usted siga atendiendo a ese enfermo, y le voy a decir por qué. *Pero entonces, Marcial ...*’ (No, Nurse Cora, I’d rather you kept tending that infirm and I’m going to tell you why. *But then, Marcial ...*; Cortázar 1966/1995, 561 [italics inserted by the author]). In this passage Nurse Cora, feeling uncomfortable when tending to Pablo, is pleading with Doctor Suárez to replace her with an older nurse. In refusing, he explains to her why she is the right person, but the original text does not contain this extract of their conversation. Instead, Cortázar moves on to a different setting, in which Nurse Cora and Marcial are speaking immediately afterwards. This is the manner in which Cortázar contextualises the full passage for Levine:

El problema aquí es que cada frase breve la piensa o dice un personaje diferente. La que hace la referencia a Marcial es Cora, porque el médico [Dr Suárez] acaba de decirle que Pablo está gravísimo, y ella [...] [le pide] que le diga toda la verdad: “Pero entonces, Marcial”, significa: “Pero entonces, ¿Pablo se va a morir, Marcial?”. Y en inglés no se tiene ese sub-sentido. Fíjate que el que habla a continuación es Marcial, para calmar a Cora y explicarle la verdad (“he estado hablando con el doctor Suárez y parece que el pibe ...”).

[The problem here is that each brief sentence is thought or said by a different character. The one who is referring to Marcial is Cora, because the doctor has just told her that Pablo is severely ill. She [...] [asks him] to tell her nothing but the truth: “But, then, Marcial”, means: “But, then, is Pablo going to die, Marcial?”. Your English version lacks this sub-sense. You see, it is Marcial who speaks next to calm down Cora and to explain to her the truth (“I have been speaking with Doctor Suárez, and it seems as if the kid ...”).] (Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 4, 310)

Cortázar dismisses the ambiguity of his original phrase (‘Pero entonces, Marcial ...’) because, for him, it exemplifies the ‘multiform perspective’ technique he expects his readers to figure out. Levine, in her capacity as his first active or engaged reader of this short story, should realise that the original fictionalises conversations between Nurse Cora and Doctor Suárez and, later on, with Marcial. Thus, appealing to his technique of moving from one character’s intervention to another in the same line, he argues that Levine has produced a literal, wrong translation. In helping her to write the appropriate version in English, he takes the trouble of spelling out the non-written words – the rest of the

conversation between Marcial and Nurse Cora, when she asks him about Pablo's inescapable fate –, and which he had cut short for readers to fathom. Levine, for her part, complying with her role as an efficient translator, keeps Cortázar's technique and does not give away the full content of Nurse Cora's intervention. However, in contrast with the original, she ensures that the reader does not get confused and is able to distinguish each participant of the conversation. She translates Doctor Suárez's words as 'No, Nurse Cora, I prefer you to stay with that patient and I'll tell you why', and the brief phrase uttered by Nurse Cora during her immediate conversation with Marcial, 'Pero entonces, Marcial ...' (Cortázar 1966/1995, 561), with an imperative form that is missing in the original: 'But, Marcial, tell me ...' (Cortázar 1973, 85). Levine puts emphasis on discriminating different subjects as informed by Cortázar and, at the same time, makes the reader wonder what Nurse Cora exhorts Marcial to tell her in relation to Pablo's condition with a short, cryptic sentence. In comparison with the obscure phrase of the original, in which Cortázar's 'subtext' or 'sub-sense' might go unnoticed, Levine's choice is more empathetic to the reader.

This latter example illustrates that during the translation process of *Todos los fuegos el fuego* Levine acted as an effective, reliable translator because she observed Cortázar's demands and catered for the readers; she facilitated textual comprehension of a complicated passage. Cortázar's careful proofreading, which he imposed as essential to avoid 'macaneos', and Levine's unquestioning acceptance of his working routine result in an English version that is controlled by Cortázar but left to Levine for submission. In this sense, their collaborative translation exhibits no traces of a conflicting mode. Their exchange was amicable and fruitful and his interference proves successful; their collaborative efficiency keeps mistakes at bay and, in the case of 'Nurse Cora', ensures that Levine is faithful to its underlying literary technique. Even when Cortázar stimulates Levine's creative liberty, he does so as long as it is on his own terms, in order to retain the oral tone of the original. His determination to supervise her work closely rests on these connected reasons: his working experience as a translator led him to believe that no perfect translator exists, everyone makes 'macaneos'; his concern that his original text would contain mistakes in translation, and his belief that, as the author, he could contribute to the solution of translation issues, led him to get involved in the translation of his work into the languages that he mastered.

Cortázar appears to have projected his previous experiences with other translators upon Levine. Possibly concerned that she would not perform, he might have supervised the translation process even more scrupulously whilst he was trying to befriend her, masking his control as assistance. Interestingly, Cortázar expects Levine to conduct herself not as a mere 'accomplice reader', who will reconstruct his original as a 'co-suffering comrade', transforming her into an 'accomplice translator', who had to equal the comprehension of the source text as Cortázar had initially intended it and to match his style. Cortázar equips her with pointers when he senses it necessary, for instance, when he explains to her the 'multiform perspective' technique in advance of her translation and insists on the orality of his short story. He also implicates himself in the process to the extent of becoming an 'accomplice proofreader' of Levine's work. He reads drafts and dispatches his corrected proofs with handwritten marginalia it and lists of amendments simultaneously to her continuation of the translation of other short stories. His concern for perfection and precision sees him scrutinising her translation in search of mistakes and

possible improvements. There is no room for Levine to take the liberty, as an ‘accomplice reader’, of potential interpretations stemming from ambiguity. In her capacity as the ‘accomplice translator’ of Cortázar as an ‘accomplice proofreader’, Levine has to reconstruct or encode Cortázar’s text into English by adhering to his observations; no subversion is permitted.

As a translator in demand and an author, Levine also had the upper hand. Despite Cortázar’s likely intention to recruit her as his new friend-translator, Levine chose to work elsewhere – her immediate projects were to include translations of texts by subversive friends like Puig and Cabrera Infante. Her subsequent seminal monograph would revolve around her inventive, high-spirited subversive collaborative translations with said authors, bringing to the fore excerpts of their epistolary exchanges, and exclude Cortázar. Nonetheless, as this essay has endeavoured to show, his edited letters unveil the translation in the making with Levine, providing a narrative of difficulties encountered, of Cortázar’s suggestions to overcome issues, and of his constant preoccupation with revision, correction, wish for improvement, which are traits he likewise exhibited as a writer. In this sense, mirroring their interactions, Cortázar’s letters to Levine constitute invaluable sources that can contribute to emerging studies on the intersection between genetic criticism and translation theory,¹⁵ for they give insights into Cortázar’s creative process, initial intentions, and personal interpretation of his own work. His explanations of key passages, not only of the short stories of *Todos los fuegos el fuego* to Levine but also of other collections and novels to translators like Blackburn and Rabassa, inform readers about how Cortázar conceived of his text. Debatable as it is to privilege the authors’ statements in their interpretation of their work, there is no doubt that these enrich literary criticism and evoke the challenges of literary translation.

Notes

1. The author would like to express her gratitude to the two peer reviewers for *The Translator*, who provided her with valuable observations to improve this article.
2. Translations hereafter are the author’s unless otherwise stated.
3. For further information on how Cortázar channelled his existential restlessness through Oliveira, see, among others, his interviews with Pereda (1978) and Marimón (1983).
4. See Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 4, 291–297, 299–303, 307–312.
5. For an analysis analysis of several author-translator relationships, see Part II (‘Collaborating with the Author’) in Cordingley and Manning (2016).
6. Two of Cortázar’s friends and translators who have briefly elaborated on this personal and working relationship are Laure Guille-Bataillon (1987) and Gregory Rabassa (2005). An examination of how they phrased their collaboration and a comparison between their experiences and Levine’s exceed the scope of this study.
7. For a full list, see Protin, whose ground-breaking PhD dissertation remains the most pertinent study on Cortázar as a translator (2003, 315–317).
8. For further reference, see 1965 letters in Cortázar’s third volume of *Cartas*.
9. For full details, see Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 2, 182, 190–193.
10. On this, see Cortázar 2002/2012, vol. 2, 447; vol. 3, 38.
11. Cortázar had recently completed a brief essay (‘Paseo entre las jaulas’; ‘Walk between the cages’) for a friend’s edition of a nineteenth-century bestiary (i.e. Franco Maria Ricci’s *// bestiario di Aloys Zötl (1831–1887)* (1972), which was eventually translated by Rabassa. His published correspondence does not indicate reasons behind this change of translator.

12. The narration revolves around Pablo, a teenager who is rushed to hospital to be operated of what initially seems to be an appendicitis, and is assigned to the care of a young nurse named Cora, towards whom he is physically attracted. Cortázar admitted having fictionalised an infatuation he had developed in his youth towards a female dentist (Standish 2001, 39).
13. Italic emphases added, unless otherwise stated.
14. This topic has been widely studied in Cortázar's novels and short stories. For the latter, see discussion of critical sources in Patricio Goyalde Palacios's second part of his 2002 monograph.
15. Salient examples of these essays, coined as belonging to Genetic Translation Studies, have recently been edited by Nunes, Moura, and Pacheco Pinto (2020).

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