Translation in the Time of Repetition: Borges's "La busca de Averroes"

Rebecca Kosick

First published in 1947, "La busca de Averroes" is one of a number of Borges's short stories that deal thematically with translation and its challenges. In this one, Borges recounts the struggles Averroes undergoes in 12th century Islamic Spain[1] to translate Aristotle's *Poetics*, and in particular the words "tragedy and "comedy." A thinking of as much as a recounting of translation, "La busca de Averroes" contributes to what we might call Borges's "theories" of translation. Though he cannot consistently be said to forward a unified theory of the practice, scholarship in this area has stressed the view that, for him, "an original does not harbor an advantage over a translation" (Kristal xix). As Efraín Kristal, describes it, "Borges

1 While this essay will focus primarily on the problem of time as it relates to translation in "La busca de Averroes," many scholars have discussed this story in relation to cultural difference and the challenges it poses for translation. For example, in Umberto Eco's study of this story, he writes that "en una traducción no está en juego sólo la relación entre dos lenguas, sino también la relación entre dos culturas" (66). In the specific context of Islamic culture, readers may also wish to consult Nada Elia, who discusses Borges's interest in Islamic culture and thought in this and others of his writings.

thought of the original as a text produced not by a superior being but by a fallible human" that could be treated as "a draft of a work in progress" to be altered or even improved upon by the translator (2). In practice, this way of thinking produced translations that departed quite radically from their originals, and Borges "endorsed transformations and misprisions, and did not mind if ideas and other aspects of an original were either eliminated or transformed in translation" (Kristal 6). These kinds of transformations are evident—though their endorsement is sometimes unclear—in "La busca de Averroes" too, where the main character does eventually produce a translation of the words plaguing him, but one that, as we'll see, quite seriously transforms their original meanings. In theory, this should be welcomed by Borges, but the story ends with the narrator, who appears to overlap with Borges himself, announcing that "en la historia anterior quise narrar el proceso de una derrota" (116). This would position "La busca de Averroes" in apparent opposition to much of Borges's elsewhere established theories of translation. But that might not be the whole story. Joseph Sharkey, for example, writes that failure "may be the lesson of Averroes's mistranslation of tragedy and comedy, but we shall see that it is clearly not the lesson of the story as a whole" (55). I agree that failure is not the lesson of the story as a whole, primarily, as I will argue, because the story as a whole includes the narrator who does the work that, elsewhere within the story, appears impossible. But I'm also not convinced that Averroes's (mis)translations of "tragedy" and "comedy" represent failure or defeat in the first place.

Instead, I would argue that these kinds of contradictions, in which Borges and his writing appear to take opposing stances, are part of his thinking on translation in this story, a practice whose theorization often includes narratives of impossibility, defeat, or endless deferral. These narratives, in turn, rely on the false promise of what Rafael Olea Franco calls "una traducción definitiva, única y perfecta" (445) that, though impossible, still exercises its power as an ideal to which translation ought to aspire. This ideal exercises its power in "La busca de Averroes" when translation appears to fail precisely because it is not perfect, or even close to perfect. But, in the story, Borges presents imperfect translations of all kinds and, at times, paradoxically sides with the possibility that some of what we think of as impossible might not be. Paradoxes of this sort are welcome

in Borges's fiction, and this is true, too, of the stories that consider translation. For example in "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" Borges challenges not just the original's purported superiority, but the original's unique claim on the text itself.[2] "La busca de Averroes" contributes another newly-possible impossible: it strips the original of the temporal advantage that it is usually assumed to have with regard to the translation, which it seems, is always condemned to come after, follow, or lag behind. It does this by rewriting the time of translation, which, rather than the endless deferral of linearity, is repetition.

For Gilles Deleuze, on whose thinking in this area Borges has been influential,[3] repetition does not indicate a return of the same. Embedded within repetition is difference, and "series are understood as coexisting, outside any condition of succession in time, and as different, outside any condition under which one would enjoy the identity of a model and the other the resemblance of a copy." As he goes on to say, "the system excludes the assignation of an originary and a derived as though these were a first and second occurrence, because the sole origin is difference" (125). This is not unlike Borges's approach to translation, in which difference is crucial, and welcomed. And this way of thinking also approximates the temporal proposal "La busca de Averroes" makes: that translation, rather than being the deferred promise of something always to-come, can coexist with the original. In turn, this suggests a productive break from the pervasive and tightly held notion that the original occupies first place and the translation always comes in second. To continue the metaphor, this would mean that, in a race in time, the original would usually be deemed the winner, and the translation would be the defeated. In "La busca de Averroes" this is not the case.

TRANSLATION DEFEATED

With this in mind, that final paragraph of "La busca de Averroes," which begins "En la historia anterior quise narrar el proceso de una derrota"

2 In this story, which will be discussed later, Menard manages to write a portion of *Don Quijote* that is absolutely identical to the original.

3 Deleuze writes, for example, that "on this question of the game of repetition and difference as governed by the death instinct, no one has gone further than Borges" (116).

(116) would seem curious. And the story would appear not to hold the same lack of regard for the original elsewhere apparent in Borges's writing and practice as a translator. Likewise, Averroes's eventual translation of Aristotle would seem to be defeated by an inability to reproduce the original's meaning. And as a narrative of "defeat" which is also a narrative about this unresolved problem of translation, "La busca de Averroes" could be taken to be a story in which the site of defeat wholly *is* translation. Though my argument is that this is not, in fact, the whole story, I want to first consider the ways in which "La busca de Averroes" does stage defeat, before later considering how the story, and its telling, propose alternative opportunities for rethinking translation's possibilities.

In addition to "tragedy" and "comedy," the story's depictions of translation (strictly or loosely speaking)[4] tend to show the would-be translator struggling to accomplish the task. And time and again, translation, and the knowledge that would enable it, is shown to be just out of reach. This is why many critics have taken the narrator's description of the story and the story's final scene—in which Averroes removes his turban, looks in the mirror, and then suddenly disappears—as proof of, or punishment for, a bad job done. Not only can he not arrive at satisfactory translations of "tragedy" and "comedy," but he also struggles to understand the theatrical context of the words that would be able to illuminate their meanings, even when it's right in front of his eyes. In one such example, Averroes is at work on another piece of writing, the *Tahafut-ul-Tahafut*. In the scene, Averroes pauses from his work, looks out from his balcony, and sees a group of children: "Uno, de pie en los hombros de otro, hacía notoriamente de almuédano; bien cerrados los ojos, salmodiaba *No hay otro dios que el Dios*. El que lo sostenía, inmóvil, hacía de alminar; otro, abyecto en el polvo y arrodillado, de congregación de los fieles" (107). This game is an act of theater, and Averroes misses it. Though it's unlikely the playing children actually could have given Averroes any real insight into the more particular case of ancient Greek theater, and the even more particular types of tragedy and comedy, his lack of understanding in the scene prevents him

4 Here, and in general, I take translation quite loosely. However, my discussion of the practice in this essay will also intersect with its stricter conceptualizations which, as I argue, govern the ways in which any given example of a translation tends to be evaluated.

from taking this individual instance of theatrical play and generalizing it toward an awareness of the context nearer to his translation struggle.

This problem of the general and the particular is echoed by the *Tahafut-ul-Tahafut* itself, which, as the narrator notes, maintains "que la divinidad sólo conoce las leyes generales del universo, lo concerniente a las especies, no al individuo" (105). Averroes finds himself in the opposite struggle, with an individual instance of theater at hand, but no general with which which to conceptualize it. In this way, the character seems defeated from the get-go, doomed in general to producing an inadequate translation in the particular. But just outside the frame, it's clear that the narrator does know the meaning of theater. And the juxtaposition of this scene with the introduction of Averroes's theater-centered translation problem not only puts Averroes's struggles into relief for readers, but overwrites the character's problem of understanding with a layer of winking dramatic irony—something the narrator and the audience are able to share in thanks to Averroes's apparent defeat.

In this way, Borges defeats that possible defeat, something that is underscored by the narrator's translation of *Tahafut-ul-Tahafut*, which he provides in parentheses as "(Destrucción de la Destrucción)" (105). This hints at the fact that, in "La busca de Averroes," destruction or defeat aren't the end of the story, and are themselves something open to contradiction, and undoing. Suzanne Jill Levine writes that "Borges sees the other side always, and tells us both sides simultaneously" (28) and this is something that can be seen in "La busca de Averroes" right from the beginning, where, if readers pay attention to what's happening between the lines, they can see the narrator not only translating when translation appears to elude Averroes, but also doing it *at the same time*, grafting a contemporaneous destruction of translation's destruction onto the story as it appears to develop in linear time. This little translation of Averroes's title is offered in the text just before the scene depicts Averroes missing the chance the playing boys offered at understanding the meaning of theater, and thus we see that Borges finds ways of telling two stories at once. In one, translation is defeated, and in the other, translation is actually, manifestly, performed. It's tough, then, to accept that Averroes is totally defeated when the narrator is, at the same time, generating the very thing that eludes the character.

Still, this double reading is only possible there if we look outside Averroes's story. Within it, Averroes confronts, and is defeated by, other missed opportunities that might have helped to solve his translation problem. For example, another appearance of theater presents itself during a dinner Averroes attends at the home of the Quoranist, Farach. There, another guest, Abulcásim,[5] describes a "maravilla" he saw during his travels in China:

> Una tarde, los mercaderes musulmanes de Sin Kalán me condujeron a una casa de madera pintada, en la que vivían muchas personas. No se puede contar cómo era esa casa, que más bien era un solo cuarto, con filas de alacenas o de balcones, una encima de otras. En esas cavidades había gente que comía y bebía; y asimismo en el suelo, y asimismo en una terraza. Las personas de esa terraza tocaban el tambor y el laúd, salvo unas quince o veinte (con máscaras de color carmesí) que rezaban, cantaban y dialogaban. Padecían prisiones, y nadie veía la cárcel; cabalgaban, pero no se percibía el caballo; combatían, pero las espadas era de caña; morían y después estaban de pie. (111-12)

Like Averroes's lack of recognition of the theater in the children's theatrical game, the dinner guests do not come away from this description with an understanding of the concept of theater as it would relate to Aristotle's "tragedy" and "comedy." And this time, it's not just incomprehension, but also incredulity, that gets in the way, although Abulcásim assures his listeners that what he describes wasn't "los actos de los locos" (111), but a story "que alguien muestra…en vez de referirla" (112).

Though we see them *almost* getting it, again it would appear that the translation of the general idea of theater operates as a site of defeat for the characters in this story who seem to confirm Averroes's assertion that, regarding "tragedy" and "comedy," "nadie, en el ámbito del Islam, barruntaba lo que querían decir" (107). Still, Abulcásim *does* describe the theater pretty understandably, enough that the other characters do seem to get an accurate, if estranging, image of what their friend witnessed. Silvia Dapía claims that this is "proof that the two cultures in question are not incommensurable," and goes on to argue that "to say that the Greek notion of theatre is incommensurable with any terms or expressions

5 Daniel Balderston explains that Abulcásim's name is "based on that of one of Averroes's biographers" (203).

of twelfth-century Arab culture and nevertheless be able to describe it as Abulcásim does, is totally incoherent" (156). Though I can't speak to the whole of the cultures in question, I agree with Dapía that Abulcásim's description can be taken as proof that the story asserts some commensurability is possible with regard to theater's portability between China and Spain, and (it's implied) Greece and whatever place and culture from which readers now encounter this story. But to adapt Dapía's assertion here to the argument I'm making about translation raises the question of whether the type of description Abulcásim does counts as a "translation" at all.

I would argue it does. And, like Borges, I would argue in favor of an expansive definition of what translation can be, which, as it relates to this story, would include, to borrow from Jakobson's framework,[6] the interlingual translation of the words "tragedy" and "comedy" as well all the instances where the characters, or the narrator, restate, recontextualize, or differently repeat something else. And I would remind readers that, with regard to this story, those re-'s don't necessarily come after that something else and are not inferior to it. Yet, I'll concede, there are identifiable degrees to which the success or defeat of a translation can be measured, particularly when translation is taken to mean perfect translation. For Borges, this is not the definition, but as I've noted, this idea has a tight grip on translation as it is understood and evaluated, which is something Jacques Derrida has also argued. He claims that "the question, What should a translation be? implies, as if synonymously, What should the best possible translation be?" (182), but I would go even further to say that the implied synonym of his question is actually "What should the best impossible translation be?" where "impossible" means the translation suffers no loss of either matter or meaning. It's by this standard of im-

6 Jakobson describes three kinds of translation: a) Intralingual translation or *rewording* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language; b) Interlingual translation or *translation proper* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language; c) Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems (261). I see all of these kinds of translation in "La busca de Averroes" but do not agree that only one can be considered "translation proper." I would also include under translation's definition, the transformation of words, objects, or things even when these things are not necessarily functioning as signs.

possible perfection that translations are deemed to have failed, and it's by this standard that Abulcásim's description appears more successful than Averroes's eventual translations of "tragedy" and "comedy," because, in Abulcásim's case, at least he gets the idea right.

Abulcásim's near-recognition of theater also looks to be more successful than Averroes's because, in Abulcásim's case, the description of a theatrical performance wasn't mediated by the narrator who apparently already understood what theater was. At the dinner, it's Abulcásim who succeeds in describing, and then offering (albeit with an increased word count) a translation of the theatrical performance he saw from the stacked balconies in China. It could be said that, because he has traveled, Abulcásim can at least see the invisible barrier that separates him from a complete understanding of theater, but it can't be said that his act of translation is a total defeat. And this is even true for the other characters involved in this scene, who, though not able to give a name to what Abulcásim describes, or to accept that twenty people would be needed when "un solo habilista puede referir cualquier cosa, por completo que sea" (107), *can* imagine the things their travelling friend describes, and, to a certain degree, share in its translation into their own context. By comparison, Averroes's overlooked balcony theater appears to more of a defeat. There, the narrator over his shoulder sees and describes the theater in the children's play, not Averroes. So in spite (or because) of the fact that the instance of theater is successfully translated via the narrator to Borges's reading audience, Averroes's failure to translate the particular to the general and back again means this specific instance of translation stands out as a defeat, at least within the bounds of Averroes's story itself.

But, though he might miss the general notion of theater in that particular instance, by the end of the story Averroes does translate the theatrical terms that are giving him so much trouble. As he writes in his manuscript, "*Aristú* (Aristóteles) *denomina tragedia a los panegíricos y comedias a las sátiras y anatemas*" (116). These translations are not perfect and many critics have commented on the lack of meaningful correspondence between Averroes's versions and the originals, as Ilan Stavans does when he asks, "¿Qué es esto? ¿Una definición? Más parece una burla" (15). Yet, I would stress again that bad or lengthy or mistranslations are not necessarily *not* translations. And, in light of Borges's theories of the practice,

however different these translations may be from the meaning of their originals, they would also qualify as translations as he might define them. They are, indeed, different from their originals, but, as Kristal has convincingly argued, "difference, for Borges, is not a sufficient criterion for the superiority of the original" (1). And if the original isn't superior, then the success of Averroes's translations (or their lack of it) need not be measured by their equivalence to it, and these translations need not necessarily be defined by loss or defeat.

TRANSLATION DEFERRED

I've been arguing that one way this idea manifests in "La busca de Averroes" is via the narrator who acts as a translator-guide through the text, translating when Averroes cannot and temporally intervening in the story to unresolve apparent defeats within it. But, be this the case, it's unlikely that readers would, on first reading, notice the narrator much at all, or at least the version of him that, rather than being an invisible omniscient voice in the background, speaks directly to the reader. This is because the narrator's "big reveal" doesn't come until the end of the story, after Averroes himself disappears. It's possible to read this order of operations as another instance in which translation is deferred, in which the narrator, who, as readers surely will have realized, is looking as much for Averroes as Averroes is for Aristotle, only comes after the unsatisfactory non-ending to the story. But my argument is that what appears to be the narrator's first, first-person intervention is also the last, and that this ending is actually a prompt to go back to the beginning and notice, during a rereading, that the narrator was already there translating, neither deferred nor defeated.

The repetition that the story encourages helps to upset a linear model of time in which translation, never being the same as the original, is never quite accomplished. Instead, it proposes a model of translation that, as different, is able to overcome its second place status. Still, there are ways in which Averroes's modest-looking feat of translation does look a lot like defeat or deferral, especially in comparison with other fictional accounts of translation within Borges's oeuvre. For example, in "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote," though the text produced is not explicitly a translation, the titular character actually manages to achieve an impossible dream of translation,

that of writing an exact replica of *Don Quijote* that coincides "palabra por palabra y línea por línea" with Cervantes's version (49-50).[7] That he does this not by becoming Cervantes, but "a través de las experiencias de Pierre Menard" in the twentieth century (50) only increases the degree to which this feat stands out from Averroes's. Unlike Averroes, Menard's distance in space and time from the context of his original presents no similar challenge to his ability to produce a perfectly identical version of it. But, "Pierre Menard" is not only a playful exploration of Menard's paradoxical feat. It's also an argument about difference, and the varying ways it comes to partake of translation, even in a text that *does* look to be identical to its original. In fact, in just this kind of case, as Deleuze writes about "Pierre Menard," "the most strict repetition has as its correlate the maximum of difference" (xxii). Taken generally, this assertion that difference inserts itself—even in a text in which perfect equivalence becomes possible—also reiterates Borges's tolerance, and indeed welcoming, of difference as it relates to, or is produced by, translation. Difference doesn't undo translation. It's inherent to it and, more generally, to repetition, which "consists in conceiving the same on the basis of the different" (41). Among the causes of difference that register in Pierre Menard's *Quijote*, the passage of time, and its consequent changes to the ways the identical text will and can be read, is among the strongest. A *Quijote* written, and read, in the twentieth century is, as Pierre Macherey writes, "a deliberate anachronism" (250), one that's bound to be received as a different *Quijote* than the one that came first.

In addition to this emphasis on difference, which appears in "La busca de Averroes" too, Pierre Menard's anachronism appears to uphold translation's usual place in time, that is, *after* the original. Walter Benjamin calls this translation's "afterlife," and though Benjamin insists that "the idea of life and afterlife in works of art should be regarded with an entirely unmetaphorical objectivity" (254), the notion of a translation *as* an afterlife is nevertheless a metaphor, and a powerful one that frames our thinking about how, and when, translation happens. This metaphor has such

7 For many, Pierre Menard's *Quijote* would not be a translation. In Jakobson's framework, for example, it would not be, because the two texts are composed of identical verbal signs. There is no interpretation at work. I'm considering it a translation for two reasons. One, because I take translation very broadly, and two, because I see the kind of equivalence imagined by Borges in Menard's text to represent, and challenge, the notion of a perfect translation.

power, in fact, that though we may take for granted that Borges is able to find ways of diminishing the advantage an original might, in Kristal's words, "harbor" over a translation—by way of believing, for example, that the translation could be better than the original—we rarely question the absolute temporal advantage the original would have with regard to its translation. "A translation comes later than the original," Benjamin tells us (254), and he's right that that's usually an unmetaphorical fact.

However, because "La busca de Averroes" presents an alternative to a linear model of time, on which coming after would depend, I've been arguing that one of its contributions is a rethinking of the assumption that translation must always follow the original. This may be paradoxical and impossible, but Borges's fiction nevertheless presents opportunities for rethinking how translation is, or must be, ordered. Even Pierre Menard begins to hint in this direction, when the narrator of the story, "al hojear el capítulo XXVI —no ensayado nunca por [Menard]— reconocí el estilo de nuestro amigo" (51). Kristal reads this passage as a way of thinking of "Borges the creative writer as translator at work with respect to works he did not translate" (130), but the passage can also be read as one that upsets the original's temporal advantage with regard to its translation. In this case, Menard's translation of the *Quijote* comes to precede the original *and* itself as the chapter in question, in which Menard's style is detected, hasn't even been "written" yet, at least not by Menard. In this way, both "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" and "La busca de Averroes" depict their translational impossibilities as actual. And this is another of Borges's important contributions to translation theory. By realizing translation's impossibilities, Borges first of all sets up an opportunity to question whether these ought to govern how translation is evaluated, and second, establishes a theory of translation that is grounded not on the promise of infinite deferral, but on a practical portrayal of something that actually happens.

TRANSLATION REPEATED

Despite its thwarting in "La busca de Averroes," translation happens. And, it happens that translation finds ways out of the demand that it must always follow, come in second, or be defeated by the original. Whatever modest feats or defeats might be won by Averroes's translations of "tragedy" and "comedy," the story itself presents a non-linear temporality in

which the translation doesn't only ever follow the original. In this way, "La busca de Averroes" also adds to the understanding of Pierre Menard's challenge to the original and its hold on time, whereby "in the passage of time it becomes increasingly difficult to determine the connotations and arbitrary associations of written language that has come down to us from the past" (Kristal 16). It's possible to read this challenge of increasing obscurity over time in "La busca de Averroes," but the opposite view—in which time adds to the available meanings of a text—is also forwarded. And on top of those poles, is a challenge to the model of time as something that would "come down to us from the past" at all. Along with it is a challenge to the model of translation as a deferred promise of a future that never quite comes, in favor of a model of time in which the original and translation(s) are part of a repeating series in which there is no first or second.

This might seem surprising in light of the story's "surprise" ending, which, in many ways, looks to stage the kind of deferred promise of a translation's afterlife. But what follows Averroes's disappearance is not afterlife, but "the deployment and explication of the multiple, of the different and of the fortuitous, for themselves and 'for all times'" (Deleuze 115). Just after Averroes disappears, the narrator appears and tells readers:

> Sentí, en la última página, que mi narración era un símbolo del hombre que yo fui, mientras la escribía y que, para redactar esa narración, yo tuve que ser aquel hombre y que, para ser aquel hombre, yo tuve que redactar esa narración, y así hasta lo infinito. (117)

This differs from Menard's relationship to Cervantes, in which the two explicitly do not coexist. Here, the narrator and "aquel hombre" do, and "hasta lo infinito." This is also not a straightforward telling of time. I mean this literally. It's clear in its own paradoxical way, but it does not suggest a line that points straight forward. Instead, it describes a repetition that goes on forever, something I would suggest has both to do with narration and with the subject of this one—translation. And the repetition, which the narrator stages here as something happening between him another him, happens at another level as well. As Marcelo Abadi suggests, with the shock of the narrator's seemingly sudden, direct intervention into the story, "el lector, sorprendido, se detiene y relee" (169). Abadi sees this prompt to read again as a chance for readers to question the inclusion

of other, unexplained events within the story, notably the presence of "la esclava que se individualiza unas líneas antes" (169),[8] but my argument is a broader one. The rereading encouraged by the narrator's intervention is an encouragement of rereading itself. It plunges readers, who until that point thought themselves to be moving forward in time, into an alternate temporality. This is one in which translation is shown not to only ever follow the original, but to be part of a repeating series that also includes them both.

When readers take another look, they find that the narrator's appearance within the text is both earlier (and later) than in what appear to be its last lines. For example, the narrator is perceptible in the story's first sentence, which begins by outlining the various iterations its main character's name has undergone over the years: "Abulgualid Muhámmad Ibn-Ahmad ibn-Muhámmad ibn-Rushd (un siglo tardaría ese largo nombre en llegar a Averroes, pasando por Benraist y por Avenryz, y aun por Aben-Rassad y Filius Rosadis)" (105). If readers begin, so to speak, from this beginning, the narration doesn't necessarily sound to be direct, but, especially on a rereading, the voice inside the parentheses does differentiate itself from the one outside of them, offering information the other doesn't, from a perspective that is shared but not identical. This information also differentiates the time of the parenthetical narrator, which does not appear to coincide with the rest of the sentence. As a final distinguishing feature, this information also takes the form of a translation of the character's name, sealing, from the (re-)beginning, the narrator's work as both telling and translating more than, and at, once.

Many of the narrator's interventions take this form—of offering information inside of parentheses that falls, temporally, out of line. In this way, the translation the narrator performs, which coexists with Averroes's

8 The slave to which Abadi refers here is referenced only briefly toward the end of "La busca de Averroes": "(En el harén, las esclavas de pelo negro habían torturado a una esclava de pelo rojo, pero él no lo sabría sino a la tarde)" (116). Many scholars have struggled with this small, violent story within the story, including Dominique Jullien who writes that, "in this story of cultural miscommunication, the slave takes on a symbolic function, as her obvious physical difference (red hair) and probable cultural difference leads to rejection and persecution by the other women" (212). While I agree that questions of cultural difference are at the forefront of this small story, I would also point out that this parenthetical aside replicates a trend I will describe shortly in which the narrator intervenes between the lines to upset the linear progression of the story.

struggle to do the same, does intersect with another of Benjamin's assertions about translation, namely that, "to some degree, all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines" (263). This is a metaphor that Benjamin sees actualized in interlineal translations of the Bible, and something Borges makes real via the narrator's temporally out-of-step asides which, in parentheses, also appear between lines. But for the most part, the between-the-lines interventions that the narrator makes are metaphorical—interventions that don't literally appear between the lines of the story, but just barely, often almost unnoticeably, interrupt its apparently straightforward timeline to reveal the narrator's presence before he reveals himself at what appears to be the end of the story.

It's along these lines that the narrator intervenes in the conversation between Averroes and Abulcásim. Just as Averroes is about to speak, the narrator writes that what the character is about to say will be "prefigurando las remotas razones de un todavía problemático Hume" (109).[9] This isn't the kind of large-scale interruption that happens elsewhere in the story. Neither is it offset with parentheses that, formally, would help to signify the arrival of a different kind of information. Instead, this intervention is subtly woven into the narrative, something readers are unlikely to take note of on first glance. But this intervention is important and points to the ways in which the narrator announces both himself and his untimeliness before (and after) we might be likely to notice. It's also a translation which puts Averroes's ideas into other (implied, but real) words. As a time-sensitive translation, the narrator's "todavía" draws attention to the difference between Averroes's moment and another, but it also raises the question of what, and when, this other time is. It doesn't correspond to Averroes's time, nor to Hume's. It could be the narrator's time, or Borges's, but "todavía," would persist after those, too, inviting readers to participate from their own moments. In this way, it's not just the narrator who encourages readers to reread the story and watch as he coincides with apparently non-coincident events, but the reader herself is able to occupy a place within the series, and to reflect on how Hume, now might still be, or not be, problematic.

9 Readers can consult Marina Martín for a discussion of Borges and Hume. According to her "la lectura que Borges hace del los *Dialogues* se nos presenta como una de las interpretaciones más atractivas y sugerentes que se han dado en este campo" (143).

Part of what translation is, Borges tells us, is the work of its own doing and re-doing, and translation belongs to the translator as much as to the reader (and narrator, in this story). This kind of assertion is also suggested before the final scene when Averroes talks with the other dinner guests. They speak about metaphor, asking if the ancient metaphors lose their potency in their repetition. Averroes adds to the conversation a defense of these old metaphors, saying:

> Zuhair, en su mohalaca, dice que en el decurso de ochenta años de dolor y gloria, ha visto muchas veces al destino atropellar de golpe a los hombres, como un camello ciego [...] En cambio, nadie no sintió alguna vez que el destino es fuerte y es torpe, que es inocente y es también inhumano. Para esa convicción, que puede ser pasajera o continua, pero que nadie elude, fue escrito el verso de Zuhair. No se dirá mejor lo que allí se dijo. Además (y esto es acaso lo esencial de mis reflexiones), el tiempo, que despoja los alcázares, enriquece los versos. (114)

Averroes's position here[10] emphasizes that when metaphors are repeated, they don't destroy literature, they "enrich" it. In this, it's possible to hear echoes of Pierre Menard in which "el texto de Cervantes y el de Menard son verbalmente idénticos, pero el segundo es casi infinitamente más rica" (54). In addition to raising the problem of compounding obscurity over time, the two stories also support Borges's notion that the translation, or the text that might appear to come second (third, fourth, etc.) can be qualitatively better than the one that seemed to come first. In the passage from "La busca de Averroes," readers are given the chance not only to see how the linear passage of time can positively impact a work of literature, but to see, again, this model of time fold back on itself, enriching the past from the future.

This happens when the narrator again makes an appearance in the midst of Averroes's words. There are no specific temporal indicators this time, but knowing that the narrator's asides often appear parenthetically, it's possible to read the possesive in "(y esto es acaso lo esencial de mis reflexiones)" not just as Averroes, but also as the narrator insisting, between the lines, on the importance of this "reflection" on repetition's enriching effect on metaphors. The double read of Averroes and the narrator made

10 Dapía points out that this position conflicts with Borges the avant-gardist, writing that "radical new metaphors stand in the center of interest of Ultraism" (152).

possible here also opens the possibility of doubly reading "reflections" such that this is not just a thoughtful reflection on the topic under consideration but a visual reflection in which the image looking back at "mí" is me. In turn, this reflects on the narrator's coincidence with "aquel hombre" and on the final scene in which Averroes looks in the mirror only to find himself replaced with that narrator. But, be it the narrator or Averroes (or an unequal reflection of the two), this assertion *is* perhaps the most essential of the story. What "they" propose here is what Daniel Balderston has called "a refusal of hermeneutic closure" (206). This refusal forms the nucleus of the theory that Borges argues for in "La busca de Averroes," but unlike the model of translation as something whose perfect realization is indefinitely deferred, Borges's story proposes that translation is imperfect, actual and repeating. Though the story stages an apparent paradox in which the narrator, in his time, is able to speak and translate in time with Averroes, the "essential reflection" the story provokes is not quite so paradoxical. In "La busca de Averroes," Borges also prompts a reflection on time as it relates to translation, and the translation as it relates temporally to the original. From the perspective of many readers, upon reflection, translations don't follow. They are the texts readers first encounter, or texts that, in bilingual editions, materially coincide with their originals. To use Benjamin's expression, this is all "unmetaphorical fact." And another of the contributions of "La busca de Averroes" is to add to the challenges Borges poses to the original and its success, and succession. Translation, the story tells us, is a good place to begin.

Rebecca Kosick
University of Bristol

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