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Borges's Most Problematic Translator

Wes Henricksen

I. THE DIVIDED OPINION ON THE DI GIOVANNI TRANSLATIONS

Critics, scholars, and readers have assessed the relative merits of different translations of Borges's work. For instance, in "Dear Mr. Borges, Which Translation Should I Read," Marcus compares four different translators' approaches to a single Borges story, "The Circular Ruins." Marcus does not rank them. Nor does he assess their quality. Instead, he focuses on deciphering how each one's approach differs from others. Some, he notes, are more, or less, faithful to the original. Others, he contends, infuse the work with certain characteristics that make it more "cinematic," or inject the work with a "sense of mystery." MacAdam takes a similar approach, comparing translations by Anthony Kerrigan, Norman Thomas di Giovanni, and Donald Yates of Borges's story "Death and the Compass." Like Marcus, MacAdam declines to draw qualitative conclusions, focusing instead on observing ways the translators differed in their approaches and choices.

Others, however, express a preference of one translator over others. Of those who do, some, like Christ, Richardson, and Wheelock, prefer di Giovanni. Christ, who published an early review of *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933-1969*, deemed it superior to prior efforts. According to Christ, Irby was a “trustworthy” translator, but Kerrigan was a “thoroughly inappropriate” one (282). The di Giovanni translations, by contrast, “come to us with an authority and a grace begotten of one of the most extraordinary literary collaborations of our time.” Christ concluded that the di Giovanni “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” (283). Christ added, moreover, that the new di Giovanni set of translations “is far better English and much more suitable to the deceptively unassuming, patiently lucid, untiringly calm and gentle tone which is Borges.”

Richardson called the di Giovanni translations “superior” (qtd in Hickey 140). He added this was “perhaps not surprising,” given that Borges himself collaborated on creating these translations. Similar to Christ and Richardson, Wheelock opined that the di Giovanni translations “are by far the best” (438). This was particularly true, according to Wheelock, “from the standpoint of their enjoyability to the average reader.” Moreover, although Basile reviewed several translators’ work, and adjudged Irby to be arguably the superior among them—which I will discuss below—he also appears to recognize the valuable contribution the di Giovanni translations have made. First, Basile lamented “that the di Giovanni translations should not have been allowed to go out of print” (“Translating Babel” 155). Second, Basile worked with di Giovanni to independently publish the book *The Garden of Branching Paths*, a full set of di Giovanni translations of the stories in *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*.¹

Some critics prefer other translators over di Giovanni. For instance, Bukiet and Nel both prefer Hurley. Bukiet called Hurley’s *Collected Fictions*

1 Others, too, have expressed praise for the di Giovanni translations. Dirda, for example, calls them “excellent” (“A Love Story”). On a personal note, it was the di Giovanni translations in *The Aleph and Other Stories* that pulled me into Borges’s orbit some years ago (Henricksen, “Why Borges Matters” 130).

“an unparalleled treasury of marvels.” Similarly, Nel, reviewing the same book, noted that the Hurley translations, when compared with earlier efforts, produced “a significantly better reading experience.” “The smooth, richer language in Hurley’s version,” Nel added, “brings such pleasure that one momentarily wonders, ‘So, this must be what it’s like to read Borges in the original Spanish.’” Basile, who compared translations by di Giovanni, Hurley, Irby, and Kerrigan of the story “The Library of Babel,” determined Irby to be the “most successful” (159). And even Christ, who favored di Giovanni, called Irby a “trustworthy” translator.

Apart from critics, Borges himself expressed contradictory appraisals of his work with di Giovanni. While he worked with di Giovanni, he sometimes praised the collaboration. On at least two occasions, he concluded the di Giovanni translations were better than the Spanish language originals, though it is unclear how seriously he spoke on these occasions. In an interview in 1981, Borges told the interviewer, “Estoy seguro de que las traducciones que hizo Norman Thomas di Giovanni son mejores que el original,” which translates to “I am certain that the translations by Norman Thomas di Giovanni are better than the originals” (Fermosel). On another occasion, after Borges reviewed the completed translation of *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, translated in collaboration with di Giovanni, Borges “was so delighted with the result that any future translation of the book, he insisted, must be based on our English version” (*Lesson 27*). Moreover, di Giovanni’s work with Borges made the author a significant amount of money, and prompted or inspired him to write a book of prose, *El informe de Brodie*, and the short story *El Congreso*, which Borges otherwise would not have written (Bioy 1377).

However, during the years they collaborated, Borges also sharply criticized di Giovanni’s translating abilities and character. For instance, Borges told Adolfo Bioy Casares that if di Giovanni had not had the assistance of the two of them, he “would be the worst translator of them all” (Bioy 1281). Borges also expressed dismay that di Giovanni was unable to translate basic Spanish phrases without assistance (1436). And di Giovanni’s inability to complete translations on his own obligated others, like Bioy, to step in and do the work for him (1437). On several occasions, Borges stated openly he wished to stop working with di Giovanni altogether, and complained that di Giovanni was overbearing (1285, 1375-76, 1379,

1431). It should be noted, however, that di Giovanni was not the only translator Borges made these kinds of complaints about. On several occasions, Borges complained about Donald Yates in a similar fashion. Borges said working with Yates was like di Giovanni “all over again,” but that Yates might be worse, and added Yates was so bad it made Borges miss di Giovanni (1442, 1445-46).

In short, both critics and Borges expressed mixed opinions on the collaboration with di Giovanni and the works they produced together. This is not surprising. What *is* surprising is the way this one translator, di Giovanni, has been singled out and attacked, not for the quality of his translations, but for unique the process through which he and Borges cre-ated them. Critics of di Giovanni accuse him of manipulating or bully-ing Borges into accepting heavy-handed changes to the original text. For example, Stavans described di Giovanni as “a savvy American who met Borges at Harvard and followed him to Buenos Aires,” and remarked that di Giovanni’s translations “have a sour reputation” (76). In Stavans’s es-timation, “Borges was often forced to accept the American’s translations, and di Giovanni went so far as to ask him to revise the Spanish original—a resourceful ploy, no doubt, but nothing to inspire confidence.” Elsewhere, Stavans claimed di Giovanni “was known to have the upper hand in their friendship,” and called di Giovanni’s collaboration with Borges “a ‘hands-on’ activist approach” to translation (Stavans & Albin 152).

Stavans is not alone in his criticism and disapproval of the way di Giovanni worked with Borges.² Moreover, evidence supports his accusations. The translator’s “hands-on” activist approach was captured on tape. Di Giovanni and Borges sometimes recorded their verbal interactions as they worked on Borges’s stories. Howard describes a typical interaction:

On tape, di Giovanni’s voice is strident and insistent; Borges mumbles, stammers, equivocates. Time and again, di Giovanni reads a phrase in Spanish, Borges proposes an English translation, and after a pause, di Giovanni suggests one or two other alternatives of his own. Borges inevitably ends up going along with di Giovanni’s word or phrase. To take

2 Indeed, several sources remark on the toxic nature of the collaboration. One author, for example, called the relationship between Borges and di Giovanni “destructive,” and added that it “resembled nothing so much as a Stephen King novel” (“Translator: Writer Everyone Loves to Hate”).

one instance, di Giovanni wishes to translate “*hombre vil*” as “scoundrel,” Borges wants “vile man”; the published text uses the former. (43)

In another instance, which took place during a seminar di Giovanni and Borges held at Columbia University in 1971. On stage in front of an audience, di Giovanni played an audiotope recording of himself and Borges discussing the translation of “Tadeo Isidoro Cruz.” In the tape, di Giovanni notes that after quoting a line from Yeats, Borges had cited the title of the book, *The Winding Stair*, and di Giovanni suggests Borges instead should have cited the title of the poem, “A Woman Young and Old,” so readers could more easily look it up. Borges asserts he believed he used the title of the book instead “because it was a fine title.” “Besides,” Borges adds on the tape recording, “it made me think of the library, with the winding staircases at hand.” Di Giovanni cut the tape off there, and turned to the students in the audience, and said, “This is a lapse on Borges’s part. The story was written eleven years before he came to the National Library” (*Borges on Writing* 118-19). Whether this was, indeed, a lapse on Borges’s part (which it likely was not) is beside the point. Borges had certainly been familiar with the National Library prior to 1955. The importance of this episode, instead, is what it reveals about di Giovanni. He went out of his way to belittle the author the audience had come to see, and on behalf of whom di Giovanni was supposed to be working.

Di Giovanni’s heavy-handedness has been criticized by others. Howard, for instance, described the working relationship as “an intimate collaboration between the brash, strong-willed Italian American [...] and the blind, soft-spoken, aristocratic Argentine” (42). Di Giovanni, according to Howard, “put his access to Borges to questionable literary uses—in particular, a determined tidying up and simplification of Borges’s highly allusive work.” Borges, for his part, ended their collaboration abruptly, during a dinner with his longtime friend and collaborator Adolfo Bioy Casares, reportedly calling di Giovanni “between the soup and the main course,” and telling him three words and hanging up the phone (48). The three words were, “Norman, we’re through.” Later, after their relationship had ended, Borges described the collaboration in unflattering terms. He referred to di Giovanni as “Nap,” short for Napoleon. As Borges told it: “He was short,

and he took charge like a general and gave me orders, which I sometimes listened to. It was his manner and his method” (Barnstone 122-23).

This anecdote, told by Borges after he had broken off the relationship with di Giovanni, appears to support the idea the translator’s heavy-handedness might have tainted the works the two created together. But other evidence points in the other direction. Statements by Borges indicate it was Borges who initiated the collaboration, and that Borges was, for a time at least, happy with it. After di Giovanni had translated some of Borges’s poetry in 1967, it was Borges, not di Giovanni, who suggested that the American translate the author’s prose. Di Giovanni, in fact, rebuffed Borges’s initial invitation. Only at Borges’s insistence did di Giovanni concede and agree to work with Borges on the prose translations. After Borges returned to Argentina, it was Borges, not di Giovanni, who insisted di Giovanni move to Buenos Aires to continue the work, which they did in daily discussions inside Borges’s library office. So, even if Borges later repudiated the relationship, he went to great lengths for a couple of years to initiate and continue the collaboration with di Giovanni. Moreover, Borges spoke glowingly of the collaboration three years into it. He wrote in 1970 that he was “lucky” to collaborate with di Giovanni:

My afternoons now are usually given over to a long-range and cherished project: for nearly the past three years, I have been lucky to have my own translator at my side, and together we are bringing out some ten or twelve volumes of my work in English, a language I am unworthy to handle, a language I often wish had been my birthright. (*Aleph* 258)

Some di Giovanni critics, nevertheless, point out that the praise Borges expressed might well have been manipulated by the Italian-American. To them, Borges was very far from “lucky” to be working with di Giovanni. These critics insist Borges was a victim, not a beneficiary, of di Giovanni’s contributions.

Di Giovanni was acutely aware of these critics, and addressed some of their accusations before he passed away in 2017. “In recent years—decades after the appearance of our work,” di Giovanni wrote, “I have also begun to be pilloried by academics who, wielding their scalpels and microscopes, have sought to condemn me for translation crimes and transgressions” (“Borges Papers”). Di Giovanni went on to cite several examples. A profes-

sor of translation theory was indignant that one piece of prose contained seven paragraphs in Spanish but eight paragraphs in English. Another attacked di Giovanni for discrepancies in the word count between the Spanish and English versions. Others took di Giovanni to task over particular phrases and wording. Some even complained “that the translations were clearer than the originals” (“Borges Papers”). A number of critics also took issue with the fact di Giovanni and Borges corrected mistakes that had appeared in the original Spanish versions. “These mistakes had been pointed out to us by the *New Yorker*’s scrupulous editors,” di Giovanni noted, adding “and Borges not only hastened to correct them for our translation but had me engineer the changes for future reprints of his Spanish versions” (“Borges Papers”). Di Giovanni had little patience for these critics, and made his opinion of them clear in an essay he posted on his personal website:

I must repeat that the translations were all made in direct collaboration with the author, whom everyone declared a literary genius—except, apparently, when he sat down with me to turn his work into English. Beneath it all I saw a tiresome ignorance of editorial standards and practice, to say nothing of an absence of common sense.

As Borges’s translator, di Giovanni has both critics and defenders, and indeed Borges was both a critic and a defender of the di Giovanni works they created jointly. Apart from di Giovanni’s influence on Borges’s work, for better or worse, some have observed the positive influence di Giovanni had on Borges’s reputation internationally. Barnstone remarked that di Giovanni was an “old friend” of Borges, “who helped him, perhaps more than anyone, to become internationally known, through English translation and lucrative contracts” (121). An Argentine newspaper noted in 1972 that di Giovanni “managed the great writer with the energy of a boxing promotor” (quoted in Howard 43). It was through the work with di Giovanni that Borges, after being published in English by a number of small presses and academic publishers, “for the first time” secured a commitment from “a major press” to publish “almost all Borges’s work” (Howard 42). This was the period, spanning only a handful of years, when Borges went from relative obscurity to international renown. “Di Giovanni’s role in this phenomenon was considerable: He became Borges’s

translator and his amanuensis, secured lucrative contracts for him with American magazines and publishers, and helped organize public appearances and trips abroad” (42).

Another chapter in the di Giovanni translation saga occurred shortly after Borges died in 1986. The Estate of Borges and the main publisher of his translated works forced the di Giovanni translations out of print. Indeed, they nullified di Giovanni’s contract, canceled projects in process, and threatened legal action if di Giovanni attempted to publish, or even distribute for free, copies of his translations. The reason was likely money. The di Giovanni translations were subject to a fifty-fifty royalty split, but the Estate and the publisher, it appears, desired more favorable terms for themselves.³ However, even if money was one of the motivating factors, there are always two sides to each story. The Estate may well have had other reasons for breaking off its relationship with the translator. Whether it did may never be known for certain, particularly now that Borges’s widow, and the executor of his Estate, María Kodama, has passed on.⁴

II. COMPARING TRANSLATIONS BY BONNER, HURLEY, AND DI GIOVANNI

The principal argument in this essay is that the manner in which the di Giovanni translations were created makes them unique, though not necessarily superior to any other particular translation. This does not involve, or at least require, any textual analysis of the distinctions between these works and others. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the di Giovanni translations do, indeed, have a distinct style. This style must necessarily reflect, on one hand, di Giovanni’s “strong-willed” heavy-handedness, and on the other hand, Borges’s own encyclopedic literary knowledge, tastes,

3 There are a number of sources that discuss the fifty-fifty agreement between Borges and di Giovanni. These include, for example, Bioy Casares 1395-96, di Giovanni “Borges Papers,” and Georgie & Elsa 73. A more extensive discussion of the suppression of the BDG (Borges/diGiovanni) works by the publisher and the Estate can be found in Henricksen, “Silencing Jorge Luis Borges.” That article also analyzes the question of whether this suppression may have violated di Giovanni’s rights as a copyright owner in the joint works.

4 After this essay was completed, but before it was published, María Kodama passed away at age 86, the same age Borges was when he died in 1986. Kodama was eulogized widely, including in the *New York Times* (Genzlinger).

preferences, voice, meticulous eye for detail. Moreover, Borges's unique approach to writing, including his extensive use of margin notes, direct and indirect references to literary works and writers, and his "intense care for the tiniest details of the evolving text," no doubt, found their way into the translations (Balderston 5). Moreover, given di Giovanni's substantial reliance on others, in addition to Borges, to find the right word in English to reflect what was meant in the original Spanish, there may well have been other unnamed collaborators, apart from di Giovanni and Borges, who played a role in producing the style of the di Giovanni translations.

A representative example of how di Giovanni's style differs from other translators is the opening sentence of "Las ruinas circulares." The original sentence reads as follows,

Nadie lo vio desembarcar en la unánime noche, nadie vio la canoa de bambú sumiéndose en el fango sagrado, pero a los pocos días nadie ignoraba que el hombre taciturno venía del Sur y que su patria era una de las infinitas aldeas que están aguas arriba, en el flanco violento de la montaña, donde el idioma zend no está contaminado de griego y donde es infrecuente la lepra. ("Las ruinas" 59)

In the Spanish original, Borges infuses straightforward plain language with a sprinkling of more conspicuous terms—*la unánime noche*, *el fango sagrado*, *el idioma zend*—not frequently found in everyday speech. This has the combined effect of being both easy to read for the general public, but also sets a mood for the story that transports readers to the exotic and surreal locale of the scene. The idiosyncratic nature of some of the language, and the length of the sentence, offer plenty of space for creative interpretation by distinct translators. As evident from the three samplings below, each translator took a highly individualized approach. Here is Bonner's, Hurley's, and di Giovanni's versions of the sentence.

Bonner

No one saw him disembark in the unanimous night, no one saw the bamboo canoe sink into the sacred mud, but in a few days there was no one who did not know that the taciturn man came from the south and that his home had been one of those numberless villages upstream in the deeply cleft side of the mountain, where the Zend language has not been contaminated by Greek and where leprosy is infrequent. (*Reader* 124)

Hurley

No one saw him slip from the boat in the unanimous night, no one saw the bamboo canoe as it sank into the sacred mud, and yet within days there was no one who did not know that the taciturn man had come there from the South, and that his homeland was one of those infinite villages that lie upriver, on the violent flank of the mountain, where the language of the Zend is uncontaminated by Greek and where leprosy is uncommon. (*Collected Fictions* 96)

Di Giovanni

Nobody saw him come ashore in the encompassing night, nobody saw the bamboo craft run aground in the sacred mud, but within a few days everyone knew that the quiet man had come from the south and that his home was among the numberless villages upstream on the steep slopes of the mountain, where the Zend language is barely tainted by Greek and where lepers are rare. (*Aleph* 55)

The first part of the sentence, preceding the first comma, gives a glimpse into the three translators' distinct approaches. The phrase "desembarcar en la unánime noche" is rendered "disembark in the unanimous night" (Bonner), "slip from the boat in the unanimous night" (Hurley), and "come ashore in the encompassing night" (di Giovanni). Bonner was arguably the most faithful to a direct translating of each individual term from Spanish to English, using English cognates for *desembarcar* and *unánime*, but at the expense perhaps of clarity for the English language reader. Disembark, in English, brings to mind someone exiting a large vessel. It is most commonly used in passenger-carrying vessels. In the past, this might have been a ferry or other passenger ship. Today, it is used in relation to air travel. The word is only rarely used in the context of a small boat, although it is clear from story that the boat is, indeed, a small canoe. This makes both Hurley's "slip from the boat" and di Giovanni's "come ashore" arguably superior, at least from a perspective of reader clarity.

As for Bonner's and Hurley's choice to use the cognate "unanimous night," English language readers are, at best, thrown off by this term. At worse, they fail to understand what it means at all. No dictionary definition of the term "unanimous," whether paired with "night" or not, would reveal what Borges was conveying in Spanish. It may be inferred what the meaning might be, but an inference, or perhaps an outright guess, is nec-

essary. The term “unanimous night” has no meaning. And even if the true meaning is inferred, it fails to paint a picture in the reader’s mind because if one thinks of a “unanimous night” it brings no discernible image to mind. Di Giovanni’s “encompassing night,” while also not a phrase commonly used in English, has the advantage of being more easily grasped. It more effectively sets the mood, captures the scene, and engages readers by producing an image in the reader’s mind.

The end of the sentence is likewise instructive. Borges writes, “donde el idioma zend no está contaminado de griego y donde es infrecuente la lepra.” Both Bonner and di Giovanni opt for the shorter “Zend language,” while Hurley uses the longer “language of the Zend.” And while Bonner and Hurley call the Zend language “uncontaminated”—again, arguably the most technically parallel term, being a cognate of *contaminado*—di Giovanni calls it “barely tainted.” We do not know if this clarifying alteration was chosen or approved of by Borges. But the effect on readers in English is to render the passage easier to digest, and it conveys a clearer, more visceral image to the reader’s mind. Similarly, where Bonner and Hurley state that “leprosy” is either “infrequent” or “uncommon,” di Giovanni asserts that “lepers are rare.” Once again, di Giovanni (and perhaps Borges, depending on his involvement or assent) strays further from the original Spanish terms, opting for short, plain-language equivalents.

These textual distinctions produced by different translators provoke highly individualized responses from readers and critics. Many have offered their own assessments of the relative merits of Borges’s translators, some of which were discussed above. These distinctions are interesting, but they are not central to the thesis of this essay. The principal controversy around di Giovanni’s translations takes place almost entirely outside the traditional realm of literary criticism. Critics focus, not on the merits of the translations, but instead on di Giovanni’s approach, method, and personality. The unique way di Giovanni worked alongside Borges to create his translations have made the translations singular. But whether they are singularly good or singularly bad depends on who you ask.

III. WHAT SETS DI GIOVANNI APART FROM OTHER TRANSLATORS

The di Giovanni translations occupy a complicated and controversial place in Borges’s body of work. Fans of di Giovanni claim he improved Borges’s

reputation in the English-speaking world, and perhaps even his prose (Howard 42). Detractors label him a self-serving conman who spoiled Borges's work by rewriting it, thereby overstepping his role as translator (Stavans 76; Stavans & Albin 152). Perhaps the truth is a little more complicated than either camp likes to admit. Howard aptly summed it up when he wrote that "the relationship between di Giovanni and Borges, like the work they produced, defies any such easy explanation" (48).

However, the works di Giovanni and Borges created, whatever one thinks of them, differ in a fundamental way from all other translations of Borges in English for the simple reason they are not, strictly speaking, translations at all. Di Giovanni did not *translate* the work of Borges, as did all other English translators. Rather, di Giovanni *recreated* each work of prose, in English, alongside and "in collaboration with" Borges over the course of several years.⁵ The relationship was certainly not always an amicable one, and much has been said and written about the rupture between them. But the fact they collaborated together to create the di Giovanni translations is not in dispute.

This fact is acknowledged even by di Giovanni's detractors. In fact, di Giovanni's harshest critics often point specifically to the fact the two men created the English language version of Borges's stories together. This collaborative process, whereby the author himself was heavily involved in creating the translations, was undeniably unique. In fact, the way the di Giovanni translations are described and discussed by critics demonstrates they are distinct from all others. MacAdam, writing in 1975, sets out to compare three "contemporary" translations of a Borges story, namely, "the translations by Donald Yates, Anthony Kerrigan, and the combined efforts of Norman Thomas di Giovanni and Borges himself." So, according to MacAdam, there is the Yates translation and the Kerrigan translation, and then there is "the combined efforts of Norman Thomas di Giovanni and Borges himself," which is not a translation *per se*, but an original joint work created by Borges and di Giovanni. For that reason, I will refer to these joint works throughout the rest of this essay, not as the di Giovanni translations, but as the Borges-di Giovanni works, or BDG works for short.

5 This language of "in collaboration with" appears in numerous places on the BDG works. This includes, for example, the cover and title pages of *The Aleph and Other Stories*, 1933-1969 and *The Book of Imaginary Beings*.

The BDG works came about as a result of the unique manner the two came to work together, as discussed above in Part I. According to di Giovanni, in response to Borges's request that the American work on translating Borges's prose, "I warned him that I did not know enough about the Argentine to translate any of his stories on my own, so would only try my hand at it if he would help" (*Lesson* 165). Borges agreed to this arrangement. Later, in 1971, Borges summarized the working relationship the two developed as follows: "When we [di Giovanni and I] attempt a translation, or re-creation, of my poems or prose in English, we don't think of ourselves as being two men. We think we are really one mind at work" (*Borges on Writing* 62-63). Notably, Borges was responding to a question about his working relationship with Bioy, one of Borges's closest lifelong friends. Borges and Bioy wrote several books and short stories together, often under a pseudonym, and spent many years meeting and dining together several times per week.⁶ Borges was asked to describe how his own work differs from that he created in collaboration with Bioy. Borges responded:

It's different because when we are together, as the Greeks might have put it, there's a third man. That is, we do not think of ourselves as two friends or even two writers; we just try to evolve a story. When somebody asks me, "Did that sentence come from your side of the table or the other?" I can't tell him. And I don't know which of us invented the plot. That's the only way it can be done. But why should we talk about Bioy Casares, since here I have at my elbow Norman Thomas di Giovanni? We work in the same spirit. When we attempt a translation...

Looking at the work routine the two developed, one gets a sense of what Borges means when he says that he and di Giovanni were "really one mind at work." The routine is described in detail in numerous sources.⁷ The two men met daily over several years, working in Borges's office in the Argentine National Library, where Borges served as director. Di Giovanni would usually take a first stab at a rough draft of a sentence or paragraph of a

6 Numerous scholars and critics have analyzed the works created jointly by Borges and Bioy Casares under the pen names they used. These include García, Marengo, and Parodi.

7 These include, for example, *The Lesson of the Master* 159-65 and *The Aleph and Other Stories* vii-viii.

story, and then run it by Borges, who often had revisions or clarifications to make. Oftentimes these clarifications dealt with cultural matters unique to Argentina about which di Giovanni had little way of knowing. Multiple days could be spent debating single sentences, and often several variants of words, phrases, and sentences were attempted and mulled over and debated before arriving at the final “correct” version. Borges and di Giovanni agreed, according to di Giovanni, “that the text should not be approached as a sacred object but as a tool, allowing us, whenever we feel the need, to add or subtract from it, to depart from it, or even, on rare occasions, to improve it” (Kristal 12).

It was this unusual working relationship, which very likely generated significant envy among others in the literary world, which has produced both celebration and derision of the BDG works. Borges occasionally praised the collaboration, saying on one occasion he was “*seguro*” (certain) the BDG works were superior to the originals, and he described them as being the product, not of translation, but of “one mind at work,” meaning the collective mind of Borges and di Giovanni, working in collaboration with one another.

Accordingly, although di Giovanni was merely one Borges translator out of many, the joint nature of the BDG works makes his translations different in a very important way to all others. Yes, he was a translator. But the fact he produced these translations side-by-side with Borges, and inserted his own heavy-handed modifications to the text, made di Giovanni arguably a joint author of the BDG works, a controversial and perhaps exaggerated claim, but one that finds support not only by di Giovanni’s joint copyright in the BDG works, but also in his fifty-fifty royalties agreement. He and Borges created the works together in a manner similar to how Borges had worked alongside Bioy on numerous occasions. This comparison was made, indeed, by Borges himself. This makes the BDG works the only fiction Borges ever created in English, with or without a collaborator. But they also, for better or worse, are infused with di Giovanni’s style, choices, and idiosyncrasies. And also, his heavy-handedness. This makes the BDG works, arguably, at once both the most authentic and least authentic voice of Borges in English. As Borges had an affinity for paradoxes, this one, too, might have tickled his fancy. The truth is, we cannot know. Whatever any particular critic, scholar, or reader might think of the BDG works, they un-

deniably stand out from other translations. None other had Borges's hand in it, nor his personal stamp of approval on the finished product. None other was created through so rigorous a process as the back-and-forth between Borges and di Giovanni and other unnamed collaborators. None other was forced out of print. None other has generated so much speculation, controversy, and intrigue. And none other was created by Borges and a collaborator working with "one mind" to translate his unparalleled fiction into English.

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