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THAT ADMIRABLE LACK OF ORIENTALISM: JORGE LUIS BORGES'S TRANSLATIONS INTO JAPANESE AS SELF-ORIENTALIZING ACTS IN *THE SONG SCROLL OF THE MANSION OF FICTIONS* (*DENKITEIGINSŌ* 傳奇亭吟草)

Abstract

This article delves into Jorge Luis Borges's approach to translation and its implications within the context of Orientalism and literary authenticity. A point of departure is Borges's prologue to "El incivil maestro de ceremonias Kotsuké no Suké," wherein he praises A.B. Mitford's narrative for avoiding the embellishments of local color, suggesting a more authentic rendition of the original Japanese tale. Borges's preference for a domesticating translation—eschewing Orientalist tropes—can be seen within the context of Lawrence Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization in translation. Venuti posits translation as an interpretive act, transferring networks of meaning rather than seeking strict equivalence. This perspective frames Borges's adaptations of Japanese poetic forms, like haikus and tankas, as inherently translational, composed in Spanish but reflecting an imagined Japanese source.

The article examines Borges's seventeen Spanish-language haikus, originally published in *La cifra* (1981) and later translated back into Japanese by the esteemed Japanese poet Takahashi Mutsuo for the 1999 centennial of Borges's birth. Takahashi's adaptations, published in the prestigious literary magazine *Subaru*, exemplify a playful and intertextual approach, transforming Borges's work into "The Song Scroll of the Mansion of Fictions." Takahashi's translation, more than a mere linguistic conversion, situates Borges within the Japanese poetic tradition, highlighting the kind of interplay between adaptation and cultural recontextualization that Borges himself made into one of the themes of his literature.

This article further contextualizes the translated haikus against the background of commemorative events in Japan, including symposia and poetry readings celebrating Borges. Takahashi's translations, appearing alongside traditional translations and other paratextual essays, underscore the dynamic interaction between Borges's work and Japanese literature. The article posits that Borges's haikus, through Takahashi's adaptations, achieve a new dimension of fidelity—not to the original text but to the aesthetic and cultural ethos of Japanese poetry, illustrating a profound cross-cultural literary dialogue.

Keywords: Borges, haiku, Latin American literature, Japanese literature, translation.

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ESA ADMIRABLE FALTA DE ORIENTALISMO: LAS TRADUCCIONES DE JORGE LUIS BORGES AL JAPONÉS COMO ACTOS DE AUTO-ORIENTALIZACIÓN EN *EL PERGAMINO CANCIONERO DE LA MANSIÓN DE LAS FICCIONES* (DENKITEIGINSŌ 傳奇亭吟草)

Resumen

Este artículo examina la aproximación de Jorge Luis Borges a la traducción y sus implicaciones para con el orientalismo y la autenticidad literaria. Un punto clave es el prólogo de Borges a "El incivil maestro de ceremonias Kotsuké no Suké", donde elogia a A.B. Mitford por evitar el color local, lo que le sugirió que se trataba de una representación más auténtica del cuento japonés original. La preferencia de Borges por una traducción domesticadora que evita tropos orientalistas se puede entender dentro del contexto de los conceptos de domesticación y extranjerización propuestos por Lawrence Venuti. Esta perspectiva enmarca las adaptaciones por Borges de formas poéticas japonesas, tales como haikus y tankas, como inherentemente traductorias, compuestas en español pero reflejando una fuente japonesa imaginada.

El artículo analiza los diecisiete haikus en español de Borges, publicados en *La cifra* (1981) y traducidos al japonés por el poeta Takahashi Mutsuo para el centenario de Borges en 1999. Las adaptaciones de Takahashi, publicadas en la famosa revista literaria *Subaru*, muestran un enfoque lúdico e intertextual, transformando los haikus de Borges en *El pergamino cancionero de la mansión de las ficciones*. La traducción de Takahashi, más que una conversión lingüística, sitúa a Borges dentro de la tradición poética japonesa, resaltando la interacción entre adaptación y recontextualización cultural que Borges hizo tema de su literatura.

El artículo coloca los haikus de Borges dentro del contexto de eventos conmemorativos en Japón, incluidos simposios y lecturas de poesía en su honor. Las traducciones de Takahashi, junto a traducciones tradicionales y otros ensayos, subrayan la interacción dinámica entre la obra de Borges y la literatura japonesa. El artículo sostiene que los haikus de Borges, a través de las adaptaciones de Takahashi, logran una nueva fidelidad—no al texto original sino al espíritu estético y cultural de la poesía japonesa, ilustrando así un profundo diálogo literario intercultural.

Palabras clave: Borges, haiku, literatura latinoamericana, literatura japonesa, traducción.

Despite the massive cultural and linguistic differences between Japan and Latin America, Jorge Luis Borges has for long been considered a modern classic in Japan, where he has been gathering readers since first being translated into Japanese in 1955. One of the more interesting aspects of Borges's numerous translations that have appeared in Japanese since then is the multiple ways in which local translators have tried to further Japanize the style and lexicon of his works that deal with Japanese or Asian themes. This strategy of translational re-appropriation is prominently present in the translation of Borges's prose works dealing with Japanese and East Asian themes such as the short stories in *Historia universal de la infamia* (1935), the lecture on Buddhism in *Siete noches* (1980), and the Japanese-inspired short pieces in *Atlas* (1984). Elsewhere I have analyzed

how, by their choice of lexicon and rhetorical devices that harken to traditional and classical forms of the Japanese language, translators have added a significant amount of local color to these translations. In this article I will analyze the most prominent example of such translational appropriation and adaptation of Borges's Asian-inflected work into the Japanese language: The highly imaginative translations of Borges's haikus into classical Japanese carried out by the prominent Japanese poet Takahashi Mutsuo 高橋睦郎(1937-) on the occasion of Borges's centennial during the year 1999.

1. Introduction: Domesticating what has already been domesticated.

A passage within the prologue to the short story "El incivil maestro de ceremonias Kotsuké no Suké," included in his early fiction book *The Universal History of Infamy* (1935), has become a common point of departure for much of past research on Borges's literature and its relation to Orientalism. In this passage Borges states that for the writing of this story:

> Sigo la relación de A. B. Mitford, que omite las continuas distracciones que obra el color local y prefiere atender al movimiento del glorioso episodio. Esa buena falta de "orientalismo" deja sospechar que se trata de una versión directa del japonés. (Borges 2005: 320)[2]

Borges's notions of clarity and authenticity in regard to translation and literary creation run through much of his fiction and non-fiction, and most of his references to the problem of translation—as the passage above shows—express a tendency toward a domesticating notion of translation. In Borges, the lack of camels makes the Koran feel more authentic, the lack of Orientalist tropes makes the Japanese tale sounds more authentic, and so on. Starting in his seminal *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995) and further developed it in *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (1998), translation scholar Lawrence Venuti's notion of translation strategies being either those of domestication or foreignization has been one of the most germane interventions in debates in translation and world literature studies. This is because the practices of domestication and foreignization overflow categories, they describe habits that rooted in commercial, ethical, discursive, mercantile, and literary practices that cut across the different dimensions of literary production, packaging, and presentation. In its

[2] "I follow the story as told by A. B. Mitford, who omits continual distractions lent by 'local color,' preferring instead to focus on the movement of the glorious episode. That admirable lack of 'Orientalism' allows one to suspect that he has taken his version directly from the Japanese" (Borges 1998: 35).

original configuration, Venuti understood a domesticating strategy as one that impinged on the original text's uniqueness within its native literary network, and furthermore accused it of being reflective of the imposition of a local hegemonic discourse or framework of Othering upon the image of the foreign text.

Furthermore, in his later book *Contra Instrumentalism* (2019), Venuti further proposes that a productive way to understand translation is to view it as an intrinsically interpretative act, a performative action that seeks to transplant into a new language not an "invariable" stable meaning putatively (in Venuti's view) found in the original text, but rather to transplant the network of signification and the signifying chain evoked by the original text into the target language. Thus, a translator's goal would cease to be the search for equivalency and would become instead the presentation of the translator's *interpretation* of the original's networks of meaning as well as their interpretation of what those networks of meaning would configurate within the cultural space of the target language.

As I will argue in this article, Venuti's interpretative understanding of translation as described above is also germane to thinking about works that, while lacking the sense of relative independence from a source text that a pure adaptation enjoys, are still intrinsically translations even though they might not at all be interested in being bound by any notions of prosodic or lexical fidelity to an original. Borges's texts dealing with Japanese themes or poetic pieces written in the *haiku* and *tanka* formats are, to borrow Rebecca Walkowitz's famous formulation, already "born translated," composed in Spanish but based in the faint image of an already-read work translated from a Japanese form. After all, as Borges has Pierre Menard saying: "My general recollection [of a certain work], simplified by forgetfulness and indifference, might well be the equivalent of the vague foreshadowing of a yet unwritten book" (Borges 1998: 92). Borges's general recollections of his readings of Japanese poetry—translated mostly into English and mostly read when he was in possession of his sense of sight—provided the vague foreshadowing of Borges's Spanish-language haikus that, one hundred years after his birth and thirteen years after his death, were translated back into Japanese with flair by the hand of one of Japan's most highly regarded poets. In the following, I will analyze a selection of Borges's haikus, and comment on the artistry involved in domesticating back into Japanese what Borges had already domesticated into Spanish.

2. Context and Commemoration: "Now an occasion for patriotic toasts"

Borges's original seventeen haikus were published in the 1981 poetry collection *La cifra*. Eighteen years later, in the October 1999 issue of the prestigious Japanese literary magazine *Subaru* すばる, they appeared for the first time in Japanese translation. The poet

responsible for adapting these Spanish pieces into veritable Japanese haikus was the poet Takahashi Mutsuo. Born in 1937, Takahashi is one of the most prominent poets of his generation. He is versed not only in free verse poetry—a genre in which he gained renown for the quality of his lyricism and for being one of the first Japanese poets to make his own unabashed homoerotic desires the theme of his work—but also in the traditional Japanese verse of tanka and haiku, and has also written works in other genres such as the novel or Noh theater. He is part of that first generation of Japanese writers to have read—and to have been influenced by—Borges, such as Terayama Shūji 寺山修司 (1935-1983) and Shibusawa Tatsuhiko 澁澤龍彦 (1928-1987). For his outstanding career in 2017 he was awarded with membership in the Order of the Culture 文化勲章by the Japanese government.

Takahashi's adaptations of Borges's haikus appeared in that special issue of *Subaru* in October 1999 as part of a series of writings on Borges on the occasion of the centennial of his birth during that year. Most of the pieces in that commemorative issue were written during the summer of 1999 and were also featured during public readings. In Pierre Menard's words, Borges's centennial became in Japan "an occasion for patriotic toasts," with the caveat that the *patria* here was the world republic of letters. And yet, considering the ways in which Borges's haikus were re-written to be re-incorporated into the Japanese tradition, perhaps the case is as Menard's commentator remarked: "Fame is a form—perhaps the worst form—of incomprehension" (Borges 1998: 94). Two commemoratory events stand out and correlate with Takahashi's adaptations of Borges's haikus.

First, in July 1st, 1999 a commemorative event took place at Rikkyo University, in Tokyo, called "Borges Symposium: In Praise of the Labyrinth" ボルヘス・シンポジウム：迷宮を讃えて. Second, three days later there was a poetry reading and performative dance event titled "An Evening of Poetry Reading and Dance" 頌詩朗読と舞踊の夕.[3] Takahashi, who had been invited to the event composed a series of odes (*homeuta* 頌) to Borges for the occasion.[4] Takahashi composed two series. The first, titled "Borges of the Land of the Rising Sun" 日いずる国のボルヘス, was composed of six tankas each followed by a prose poem on some of the themes of Borges's literature: "Mirrors," "Labyrinths," "Rivers," "The Sword," "Tigers," and "Blindness." The second series, "Borges's Brain" ボルヘスの脳, was composed of a single poem.

Whether Takahashi also read some of Borges's seventeen haikus which were to be published in the commemorative issue of *Subaru* is unclear, but nevertheless, considering that these seventeen haikus appeared in the September issue of that magazine, they must

[3] Information about this event is taken from the September 1999 issue of the magazine *Subaru* (1999: 78).

[4] Takahashi was one of multiple writers to give a reading of their odes to Borges for the occasion. Amongst the other participants there were poet Tada Chimako多田智満子 (1930-), critic Yomota Inuhiko四方田犬彦 (1953-), and poet Kido Shuri城戸朱理 (1959-).

have been fairly close to completion by the time of this July event, as usually Japanese magazines hit the stands several weeks in advance to their actual month of issue.

In any case, the pages of the September 1999 issue of the prestigious literary magazine *Subaru* were dedicated to celebrating the centennial of Borges's birth, as was the issue for the same month put out by the rival magazine *Eureka* ユリイカ. In that issue the latter magazine also included Takahashi's odes to Borges mentioned above.

The subtitle for the September 1999 issue of *Subaru* was "Special Issue: Reading Borges 100 Years after his Birth in this New Century" 特集: 生誕100年ボルヘスを読む新世紀, and included not only Takahashi's adaptations of Borges's haikus, but also essays by the Belgian literary scholar Paul de Man (*Subaru* 1999: 180-187) and the Japanese novelist Muroi Mitsuhiro室井光広 (1955-2019) (*Subaru* 1999: 170-175),[5] as well as traditional translations from Borges's early book *El tamaño de mi esperanza* (1926) (*Subaru* 1999: 206-221), along with an interview with Borges's widow María Kodama (*Subaru* 1999: 188-199).

The month following the initial commemorative issue of *Subaru*, the October 1999 issue of the magazine carried Takahashi's Japanese translation of Borges's seventeen haikus. Originally having been published with the simple title of "Diecisiete haikus" in the 1981 poetry collection *La cifra*, they now appeared metamorphosed into "The Song Scroll of the Mansion of Fictions" (Denkiteiginsō 傳奇亭吟草) (Takahashi 1999: 48-52). Takahashi's translations—appearing with the translator's name prominently featured in a prestigious literary magazine whose readership would be familiar with the renowned poet's style—foregrounded their own adaptational and intertextual quality while also displaying a certain playfulness. For one, the radical change of title in the Japanese translation would contrast with the traditional straightforward Japanese-language translation from *El tamaño de mi esperanza* that had appeared just in the previous issue of the magazine. Readers of the piece would not be under any expectation for Takahashi's haikus to show any fidelity to Borges's original haikus, but rather, as the new playfully allusive title suggested, to read it in stride as a throwback to the tradition of loose adaptations (*Hon'an*翻案) of Western literature that were prevalent during the Meiji Era 明治時代 (1868-1912). In fact, as if to underline the point that Takahashi's haikus were not intended to replicate the meaning of the originals, in the pages of the magazine his re-imported haikus were printed next to more traditionally faithful Japanese-language gloss of Borges's haikus provided by a scholar of Latin American literature. Takahashi's

[5] In 1988 Muroi was awarded the Gunzō Literary Debut Prize in the Field of Criticism群像新人文学賞評論部門 for his essay "The Power of Zero: Fragments on J. L. Borges" 零の力 J.L.ボルヘスをめぐる断章. Six years after this essay, in 1994, Muroi would also be awarded the prestigious Akutagawa Prize in Literature 芥川賞 for his novel *A Dancing Puppet* おどるでく (1994), a work heavily inspired by Muroi's reading of Borges. Both prizes can also be taken as examples of the rising influence of Latin American literature in Japan after the 1980s.

resulting 17 haikus, then, become an almost museum-like installation of Borges in profile against the Japanese tradition that first inspired him. In this new shape, Borges's haikus could now be better read against the wider context of Japanese poetic aesthetics. As a result, to borrow Borges's famous formulation, the Spanish-language original haikus might have well been unfaithful to these Japanese-language translations.

Takahashi accomplished this effect by different translational strategies for each haiku, but his strategy is already foregrounded by the collective title he gave to his haiku series. The title of the series "Denkitei Ginsō" 傳奇亭吟草—meaning approximately "The Song Scroll of the Mansion of Fictions"—is an allusion to *Denkishū*伝奇集, the Japanese title of Borges's *Ficciones*, but it is also a crafty allusion to novelist and demi-monde chronicler Nagai Kafū's 永井荷風 (1879-1959) poetry collection *Henkikan Ginsō*偏奇館吟草 (1946), which at the time of its publication made explicit use of already archaic-sounding title that echoed older Classical Sinitic poetry collections.[6]

3. Analysis and Exegesis: This Craft of Haiku.

Let's now turn to a selection of "Diecisiete haikus" whose adaptations by Takahashi show some of the most representative techniques and translation strategies he used for the project. The Spanish-language originals are followed by Takahashi's rewriting in Classical Japanese (henceforth shortened to "CJ"), transcribed in both the original Japanese script and its romanization, with my English-language translation between brackets. Following these, I have also added the Modern Japanese (henceforth shortened to "MJ") translations done by Yamamoto Akiko 山本空子 from which Takahashi was working and which were also reproduced in that issue of the magazine. I have supplemented commentary on the main types of adaptations and cultural translations in which Takahashi engages throughout this experiment of poetic adaptation across literary traditions. My translations into English, written within brackets, strive for a literal gloss meaning while attempting to hedge as closely as possible to the syntax and lexicon of Takahashi's antiquarian classical Japanese.

[6] Kafū was also a writer of the underworld rather in the French tradition of Paul Verlaine's *poète maudit*, writing about the world of prostitutes and pimps of fin-de-siecle Tokyo. He was also fluent in French, and in fact *Henkikan Ginsō*'s epigraph is a quote from Verlaine, given both in the original French and in Kafu's Japanese-language translation: "De la musique avant toute chose ——" 詩は何よりも先まづ音楽的ならむことを (Nagai 2010: 213).

1. Algo me han dicho / la tarde y la montaña/ Ya lo he perdido.[7]
CJ: 夕暁くる 山大いさよ 失せにけり
Yūyakuru Yamaisayo Usenikeri
[Burning evening / Oh so great mountains/ Faded away]

MJ: 何事か伝えてくれた、 夕方と山が。もう忘れてしまったが。
Nanigotoka tsutaete kureta, Yūgata to yamaga. Mō wasurete shimattaga.

A common feature of Takahashi's re-imagining of Borges's haikus lie in the conjugations of their verbs; all of them use Classical Japanese conjugations not used—although occasionally appearing in fossilized form—in modern Japanese. Here, Takahashi's *usenikeri*, (modern Japanese, *ushinatte shimatta;* meaning "irremediably lost") is one such example. Furthermore, Takahashi embellishes Borges's simple pairing of parallel nouns in "la tarde y la montaña," by having "la tarde" become the poetic *makura kotoba* 枕詞that is in accordance with haiku syllable patterns and seasonal words, *Yūyakuru*, which is a *kigo* 季語, or seasonal word, for summer.[8] In this manner, Takahashi's verse evokes the setting summer sunlight falling on the side of the mountains.

2. La vasta noche/ no es ahora otra cosa/ que una fragancia.
夏の夜や 明けて香りの 如きもの
Natsu no yoru ya Akete kaori no Gotoki mono
[Oh, summer night/ After sunrise something like /A fragrance]

ひろひろとした夜　今となっては 残り香りでしかない
Hirohiro to shita yoru Ima to natte wa Nokori kaori de shika nai

Continuing with the seasonal theme, Borges's "vast night" becomes "the summer night" (夏の夜), inferring that a "vast" night corresponds to those of the cloudless Japanese summer. The expression *gotoki mono*, as well, uses a classical Japanese construction meaning "resembling something" that is usually not used in modern

[7] All following quotations of Borges's "Diecisiete Haikus" are taken from *Obra Poética / Jorge Luis Borges* (Borges 2007).
[8] A *makura kotoba* 枕詞is an adjectival phrase that precedes and qualifies a noun, usually aiding the noun reach the required five or seven moras of the Japanese poetical line. They function in a similar way to the Homeric epithet of the classical Greek epics. Some of these *makura kotobas* also serve as *kigos*. Haruo Shirane defines *kigo* as follows: "Seasonal word, a requirement of the hokku, indicating the season of the verse" (Shirane 1998: 296). Related to this is the concept of *kidai* 季題, a "seasonal topic, usually centered on a cluster of fixed associations, on which poets were required to compose" (Shirane 1998: 296). As most haikus require one or both of these elements in their composition, it is only natural that they make an appearance in most of Takahashi's adaptations of Borges's haikus.

Japanese. This adaptation is also the first in Takahashi's series to use a *kireji* 切れ字, which is the letter *ya* in the first verse. *Kirejis* are both a quintessential element of haiku aesthetics and a powerful candidate for one of Emily Apter's unstranslatables. As Haruo Shirane explains in monograph *Traces of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory, and the Poetry of Bashō* (1998): "The cutting word (*kireji*), a requirement of the hokku, often gave the hokku the dynamics of two linked verses within the confines of a seventeen-syllable hokku. (…) The cutting-word had the paradoxical function of both cutting and joining, of allowing for both [Roman] Jakobson's combination and his equivalence. (…) The cutting word not only separates into two parts, it establishes a visual correspondence between the two images (*mitate*), implying that the latter represents the haikai essence of the former, a classical topic" (Shirane 1998: 100-102). An equivalent to this functional element of haiku aesthetics was completely absent in any of Borges's original Spanish-language haikus, but it will re-appear again often as a re-localized element in Takahashi's versions. In this haiku, the particle *ya,* thus, serves to link in meaning and in imagery the visual perception of the summer night with something "resembling a fragrance."

4. Callan las cuerdas. / La música sabía / lo que yo siento.
CJ: 絃しづまり 耳しづまりぬ 朝は秋
Gen shizumari Mimi shizumarinu Asa wa aki
[The cords quieten down/ The ears quietened down/ Morning is autumn]

弦はしずまった。音楽は　私の感じていたことを　知っていたのだ。
Gen wa shizumatta. ongaku wa watashi no kanjiteita koto o shitteita no da.

The *cuerdas* (strings) in Borges's haiku evoke the reverberations of tango music, especially as in 1965 Borges himself had previously authored a book of tango *milongas*, *Para las seis cuerdas* (*For Six Strings*).[9] Takahashi's version adapts this instrument to a Japanese setting. The Argentine guitar might be to tango what the Japanese wind flute is to traditional Japanese music, but Takahashi has replaced the final verse and displaced the evocation to tango with an explicit evocation to a season: autumn (*aki* 秋), in that last line, "morning is autumn," which also reads like an inversion of the famous opening line of Sei Shōnagon's 清少納言Heian period classic *The Pillow Book* 枕草子 that famously begins with the sentence "Spring is dawn"（春はあけぼの). Perhaps not coincidentally, Borges's last published posthumous translation is that of this Japanese book, translated in collaboration with his wife María Kodama as *El libro de la almohada* in 2004.

In this manner, the elegiac evocation of tango in the Spanish is replaced with the evocation of a cooling autumn giving way to winter. Note as well that, continuing the

[9] Milonga is a form of tango, or, in some cases, the dance that accompanies the tango music itself.

pattern of anachronistic elements that is present throughout in these adaptations, Takahashi uses an older variant character for "strings"; not the modern *gen*弦, but the more ancient-looking variant *gen*絃. Borges's "música" ("music") disappears and is replaced with *mimi shizumarinu*, "my have quietened down." Thus, the feelings of the listener in the original are transposed to ears that nostalgically no longer hears whatever the strings had been playing until then.

> 6. Oscuramente / libros, láminas, llaves / siguen mi suerte.
> CJ: 秋深し 古册の上の 鍵の束
> *Aki fukashi Kosatsu no ue no Kagi no taba*
> [Deep autumn/ On top of the old tomes / A bundle of keys]
>
> 本、図版、鍵 /それらは暗く /私の運命を追っている。
> *Hon, zuhan, kagi sorera wa kuraku watashi no unmei o otteiru.*

Borges's opening adverb "oscuramente" ("darkly") is replaced here with the seasonal word (*kigo* 季語), *aki fukashi*秋深し "deep fall." Whereas the original, like many of Borges's compositions in his late stage, has strong connotations of referring to his own blindness—that he lived in literal darkness—, the haiku version features rather an element not present in the original. The darkness in Takahashi's version is not of the individual, it is the darkness of Japanese haiku poetics: it gestures towards the natural word, the deepness of the woods and the harshening of the weather as fall gives way to winter. Also, as Takahashi must have been aware of when he selected the traditional *kigo* of *aki fukashi*秋深し, it also serves to entangle Borges's poetics with those of Japanese haiku. In fact, Matsuo Bashō began one of his last haikus—written two weeks before his death—with exactly the same kigo: *Aki fukaki Tonariha naniwo suru hito zo*秋深き 隣は何を する人ぞ [Late autumn / Next door / What is my neighbor doing?]. This *kigo* can also be seen in a plethora of other haikus and waka, ranging from earlier compositions, notably in some songs of the 15th-century imperial anthology *New Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern* (*Shin Kokin Wakashū*新古今集), up to works by haiku poets such as the contemporary *haijin* Hasegawa Kai長谷川櫂 (1954-).

> 9. La ociosa espada / sueña con sus batallas. /Otro es mi sueño.
> CJ: 切結ぶ 霜夢みてや 劍錆ぶ
> *Kirimusubu Shimo yumemite Tsurugi sabu*
> [Being in cutting entwined/ Watching dreams of dew! / The sword rusts away]
>
> 怠け者の剣が 戦いを夢みている。 あるいは夢見ているのは私。
> *Namakemono no ken ga tatakai o yumemiteiru. Aruiha yumemiteiru no wa watashi.*

This haiku features the theme of the forbear's no-longer-used sword, a theme already present in tanka number three of Borges's "Tankas" included in the 1974 poetry collection *El oro de los tigres*.[10] As such, it features a heavy autobiographical element. The reader is expected to be somewhat familiar with the fact that Borges's ancestors took up arms during the Argentine wars of independence, and to infer on Borges's part at least a modicum of ambivalence in relation to the poet's decidedly un-martial personality and his predilection toward the republic of letters instead. Most Japanese haiku do not develop these kinds of autobiographical lines. If any, perhaps an allusion or use of a line by a famous *hokku* or *tanka* of one's literary masters from the past (*honkadori* 本歌取り), but the kind of reference to a personal family history that Borges is making here is especially scarce in traditional haiku poetics, especially considering the fact that Borges closes his haiku by declaring, in the first person, that "other is my dream."[11]

In this vein, Takahashi focuses not on the voice of the *haijin* announcing that he dreams of other endeavors, but on the sword *itself*, which has "frost dew-like dreams" (*shimo yume*霜夢) of "intertwining [its blade] again [against other swords]" (*kirimusubu*切り結ぶ). The morning dew that frosts over is an image of transience, and the word for dew frost (*shimo*) itself is a seasonal word for winter, which is the firm seasonal location of this haiku, thus repeating again the theme of old age, oblivion, and decay.

However, what is the most skillful in this adaptation is the opening line (*kirimusubu*), which is a borrowing, or, in haiku terminology a *honkadori* 本歌取り, from the opening *makura kotoba* of a *tanka* attributed to Miyamoto Musashi宮本武蔵 (1584-1645), Japan's most renowned swordman and author of the classic philosophical and martial treatise *The Book of Five Rings* 五輪書 (1643). The tanka attributed to him is below:

> Under the sword lifted high/ There is hell making you tremble/ But go ahead/ And you have the land of bliss. (Qtd. in Suzuki 1972: 317)
>
> *Kirimusubu /tachi no shita koso /Jigoku nare / Hitoashi Fumikome / Sokoha Gokuraku*

[10] That tanka reads as follows: "La ajena copa, / la espada que fue espada /en otra mano, / la luna de la calle,/ ¿dime, acaso no bastan?" (Borges 2007: 347). Some years later in the interview collection *Borges el memorioso* (1982) Borges would provide illuminating commentary on each of one of the tankas included in *El oro de los tigres*. The reference to his forbears is here made explicit: "Yo estaba pensando en la espada de mi abuelo, el Coronel Borges" (Borges y Carrizo 1982: 304). Borges's lament in this haiku—that even while having military ancestry he himself was able to take up only the pen and not the sword—is also present in other parts of his oeuvre as well.

[11] If anything, this confessional and autobiographical style is rather more reminiscent of the allegoric poems of the Chinese Tang tradition in which the exiled bureaucrat takes on the persona of the spurned lover in order to seek redress from the emperor.

切り結ぶ太刀の下こそ地獄なれ、一足踏み込め、そこは極楽.[12]

As a further anachronistically exotic element, the character for the rust of the sword is written not in the modern spelling of *sabi*錆, but in one of its pre-modern forms as *sabi* 銹.

12. Bajo el alero / el espejo no copia / más que la luna.
CJ: 軒深く　暗む鏡か　月讀か
Noki fukaku Kuramu kagami ka Tsukiyomi ka
[Deep in the eaves / A darkening mirror? / Or [is it] the moon?]

軒庇の下で　鏡は月しか　映さない。
Noki hisashi no shita de kagami wa tsuki shika utsusanai.

13. Bajo la luna/ la sombra que se alarga / es una sola.
CJ: 月の出や　野ずゑに届く　影一つ
Tsuki no deya Nozuwe ni todoku Kage hitotsu
[Oh, moonrise! / Reaching the ends of the field /A single shadow]

月の下で　伸びる影は　ただ一つ。
tsuki no shita de nobiru kage wa tada hitotsu.

Borges's twelfth and thirteenth haikus are linked in both their structures and themes, playing with the theme of the mirror that doubles what it reflects, the light from the moon, and the shadow of the speaker and the mirror. Noteworthy is the fact that haiku number twelve adapts Spanish's "la luna" as *tsukiyomi* 月讀, which is written in a premodern variant kanji instead of the modern spelling of月読, and which is also the name of a native Japanese Shinto goddess.

Similarly, haiku number thirteen is adapted in such a way that the obvious parallel construction with its preceding haiku is obscured. First, Takahashi puts the emphasis not on what is "Below the moon," but on the moon itself, whose appearance in the sky is

[12] The English translation quoted above is the most common one in English, appearing, among other sources, in prominent Zen popularizer D. T. Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (1934). It is worth mentioning here that it was Suzuki who Borges read as part of his intellectual interest in Zen Buddhism.
Perhaps owing to the period in which Suzuki translated Miyamoto's haiku (early 20th century), the translation quoted above seems somewhat stilted in today's English and not reflective of the original Japanese. A more modern rendition would be: "Below two intertwined swords lies Hell itself, and yet, step into this space, for in it there lies Paradise itself." The key meaning that the traditional translation does not convey, and which is what Takahashi is using in his adaptation of Borges, is the way in which the verb *kirimusubu* implies that *two* swords are intertwined and caught in mutually mortal conflict.

emphasized with the cutting word *ya*. Second, whereas Borges has a fairly universal "the shadows that grows" ("la sombra que alarga"), which allows this haiku to take place in the same location ("under the eaves") of haiku number twelve Takahashi locates the growing shadow against a specific background: the ends of the fields (*nozuwe*野ずゑ). This, in turn, makes Takahashi's adaptation much more pastoral, a haiku in which the shadow expands "to the end of the fields." Continuing the use of archaic forms, the *hiragana* character *we*ゑ in 野ずゑ is completely obsolete and not used in modern Japanese, once again translation Borges's clear and modern Spanish into an explicitly anachronistic Classical Japanese.

> 15. La luna nueva / ella también la mira / desde otra puerta.
> CJ: 新月や 女をろがむ どの戸より
> *Shingetsu ya Onna worogamu Dono to yori*
> [Oh, new moon/ The woman worships [it] /From some door]
>
> 新しい月 — あの人も別の扉から それを見ている。
> *Atarashii tsuki ano hito mo betsu no tobira kara sore o miteiru.*

The interest contrast between the versions in this haiku is the fact that the woman's simple "looking at" ("la mira") has been elevated to the woman "worshiping" (*worogamu* をろがむ equivalent to modern Japanese verb *ogamu* 拝む) the moon, a figure that is further strengthened if we remember that above, in haiku number twelve, the moon had already been referred to as *tsukuyomi* 月讀, which is also the name of the Shinto moon goddess. Thus, whereas in Borges the moon appears as the impassive element that, regardless to its distance and indifference, connects both the poet and his beloved, Takahashi's version effaces this connection by leaving out any equivalent to Borges's "she *also* looks at it." Similarly, the "door" mentioned here is *to*戸, meaning "gate," not the more modern variants equivalent to the fairly modern Spanish "puerta."

Furthermore, both here and in haiku number nine Borges has used the word "other" ("otro/otra"). The concern with the dichotomy between the Self and the Other is also one the recurrent themes in Borges's literature. Borges also plays with the theme of the doppelganger in some of his short stories and essays—for example, the short essay "Borges and I," or his poetry collection *El otro, el mismo* (1964). Takahashi has decided to foreclose on this possible heteroglossia in his adaptations, supplanting "otro/otra" with other images or tropes that are more congruent with the aesthetics of vagueness of the haiku. This haiku is no exception, adapting "desde otra puerta" into "from a certain gate" どの戸より.

16. Lejos un trino. / El ruiseñor no sabe / que te consuela.
CJ: 慰まん 君とも知らで 夜鶯
Nagusaman kimi to mo shira de Yoru uguisu
[Let it comfort you / He that does not know you / The night warbler]

遠くに囀り— 小夜啼鳥は 君を慰めていることも知らず。
Tōku ni saezuri sayo wa kimi o nagusameteiru koto mo shirazu.

Takahashi somewhat nationalizes the species of the bird that plays a central role in this haiku. He provides *yoru uguisu*夜鶯 for Borges's nightingale. While this word is one of the names for this bird in Japanese, it is usually called by a more common alternate name *sayonakidori*小夜啼鳥, or the English-language loanword *naichingēru* ナイチンゲール. Borges probably had in mind this specific bird not only because its syllable count in Spanish makes it an ideal candidate to fit into the 7-mora central line of a haiku, but also used it to reference John Keats's nightingale. Borges had dedicated an essay precisely to this animal, "El ruiseñor de Keats" ("Keats's Nightingale"), included in the essay collection *Otras inquisiciones* (1952), as well as the poem "Al ruiseñor" included in the 1975 poetry collection *La rosa profunda*.

Another of the effects of this kind of transculturating adaptation is that *uguisu* 鶯 is a word that also functions as a seasonal word in haiku, thus setting Takahashi's poem firmly in spring. Furthermore, Takahashi's use of *kimi* 君 for "you" here has the felicitous effect of reflecting, or even amplifying, the poet's address to his lover, which becomes more personal and affectionate than the Spanish "tú" implied in Borges's original.[13]

17. La vieja mano /sigue trazando versos / para el olvido.
CJ: 忘られん ために書く手や 年古ぶ
Wasuraren Tameni kaku te ya Toshi furubu
[In order to be forgotten/ Oh, writing hand! / The ageing years]

この古い手は 忘却されるために 歌を書き綴る。
Kono furui te wa bōkyakusareru tameni uta o kaki tsuzuru.

The cutting word *ya* follows "the writing hand" (*kaku te)* in this final haiku, establishing a parallel between this hand that writes "in order to be forgotten" (*Wasuraren*

[13] Similar to Spanish, Japanese also has multiple words for the second person singular. *Kimi* is one of them, and in modern Japanese is still very much in use as an informal second person pronoun roughly equivalent to the Spanish "tú." However, depending on the period, it also appears in pre-modern Japanese poetics as an even *more* intimate second person pronoun, usually used by lovers when addressing each other. The fact that in Takahashi's version *kimi* is closely followed by the classical conjugation *shirade* further strengthens this reading.

tameni) and the poem's coda offered in the closing line: "The years that get older" (*Furubu toshi*). Another possible parsing of this verse is to read *Toshi furubu*年古ぶ, not in the plural as "years" but in the singular, "the ripening year."[14] This meaning, which would form a contrasting pair with the "new year" (*shinnen* 新年), would convey both a sense of season to the poem (winter), and a sense of finality that is fitting to the closing haiku of the series, in which Borges's oblivion can also be seen to be carrying strong undertones of approaching death for the author who was already late in years. Something of the unadorned quality of old age comes across as well in the fact that Borges's poetic "trazando versos" becomes the unembellished and unornamented "the hand that writes," thus accomplishing the strange feat, for once in these adaptations, of having the Japanese translation be more laconic, modern, and sparser than the Spanish-language original.

Taken all together, as we have analyzed in this section, the Japanese language, or rather the Japanese language *style*, that Takahashi employs throughout his adaptations of Borges's haikus can be considered one of intentionally anachronistic domestication. That is to say, it is not a Japanese translation full of calques from the Spanish, but a translation that, while somewhat readable to modern Japanese reader, is written in the now foreign language of the local past and which is in conversation more with the diction and conventions of classical haiku poetics than with any notions or concerns with Borges's native Spanish-language tradition.

Takahashi's anachronistically exoticizing experiments in these seventeen haikus are bold in range. In his adaptations from Borges the translation strategy has become at the same time a project to "re-nationalize" a foreign Borges into a regiment of relevance that would be only familiar to Japanese readers of haiku, and, also, an experiment to project Borges's physical distance from Japan into the axis of temporal distance of the aesthetics of Japan's own past. The fact that average modern Japanese readers would have trouble parsing through Takahashi's translations can be gleamed at from the fact that the auxiliary and supplementary *furigana* reading has been given to some—but, importantly, not all—of the most difficult kanji characters in Takahashi's haikus.[15] To be sure, this was not entirely due to Takahashi's originality; a large percentage of contemporary haiku today is still written closely hemming to ancient literary language (*kogo* 古語) and classical spelling (*rekishiteki kanazukai*歴史的仮名遣い). The originality lies not so much in the actual praxis as in the subject choice: Spanish-language haikus written in modern language transposed to the language, prosody, and stylistics of classical Japanese haiku.

[14] Similar to modern Japanese, classical Japanese does not mark for noun number, so the same nouns can be singular or plural depending on context, thus allowing for multiple interpretations.

[15] My personal experience with Takahashi's adaptation also leads me to this conclusion; even amongst the university-educated native Japanese acquaintances that I conducted; none could get through all 17 haikus without stumbling or equivocating on some of the characters and compounds in the haikus.

Thus, Takahashi's "translations" operate less as modern translations of a foreign poet into Japanese and more as an explicitly conscious choice to employ the highly localizing strategies of the late Meiji-period highly liberal Japanese adaptations from foreign literature (the previously mentioned, *hon'an* 翻案). Similar to the uncanny translator in Borges's "Pierre Menard," Takahashi's language in his adaptations would be unremarkable if written in the 17th century but are imbued with all the weight of the (Japanese) literary past when written at the end of the 20th.

In this manner, in these new rewriting adaptations by the author-translator Takahashi Mutsuo, Borges remains a foreign writer, but now in the sense of being a writer from the local Japanese past, full of local color and localized (or domesticated) turn of phrases. "Fame is a form—perhaps the worst form—of incomprehension" (Borges 1998: 94), lamented Pierre Menard's commentator. Are Takahashi's beautiful haikus—museum pieces from a fictional past in which Borges was a *haijin*—a form of incomprehension, adding in local color when Borges inveigled against the abuses of Orientalism for much of his career, an attitude present even in the haiku and tanka that he composed in Spanish? Or rather, is it the case that, as in Borges's own famous formulation "el original es infiel a la traducción"?[16] Translated, adapted, domesticated, Borges's haikus stand out in all their foreignness through the prisms of Takahashi's domesticating translation, especially as they're written not in modern Japanese, but in its classical form. As the old adage states, the past is a foreign country, and they do things differently there.[17]

However, Borges was not unaware that imitation can be the highest form of flattery. In an Argentine radio show that he cohosted with Antonió Carrizo, and which was broadcast in 1982, Borges turned to the tankas that he has included in his poetry collection *El oro de los tigres* (1972). Borges's pride and sense of accomplishment at having been able—across an ocean of waters and centuries—to reproduce the "intonation" of the

[16] From Borges's essay "Sobre el *Vathek* de William Bradford" (1943), included in *Otras Inquisiones* (1952).

[17] Readers not familiar with the multiple evolutions of the Japanese language might wonder about Takahashi's translations' legibility in the 21st century. We need only remember that while multiple modern Japanese language translations of *The Tale of Genji* exist, this linguistic distance is still present in works written as late as late 19th century and early 20th century. As contemporary author Mizumura Minae 水村美苗has written in her thought-provoking scried *The Fall of Language in the Age of English* (2008, English trans. 2017), she herself was approached by a Japanese publisher with an offer to translate Higuchi Ichiyo 樋口一葉 (1872-1896) into "modern Japanese." Mizumura, somewhat of a language purist, refused on the grounds that in order to foster a cultured Japanese readership it was necessary to nurture their ability to read Higuchi's original text in the classical style, but the publisher's perceived need for these kinds of modern translations of not-so-distant modern classics, as well as the presence of a plethora of modern Japanese language translations of pre-modern Japanese literature, speaks volumes as to the hardships of modern readers to approach the classical form language, precisely the form in which Takahashi wrote his adaptations of Borges's haikus.

original Japanese classical poetry comes across in his comment, and can also be perhaps extended to the afterlife of his own haikus in Takahashi's adaptation:

> Ahora, yo sé que un japonés leyó estas *tankas*, y creyó que una de ellas era una traducción del japonés. La buscó en una antología que tenía. Lo cual, para mí, es el mayor halago, ¿no? Se dio cuenta que las otras eran occidentales, meramente, sí. Pero de una de ellas creyó que podía ser mi versión del original. Lo cual quiere decir que yo había acertado con la entonación o con lo que se espera de una *tanka*. (Borges y Carrizo 1982: 304)[18]

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[18] "Now, I'm aware that a Japanese man read these tankas, and believed that one of them was a translation from the Japanese. He looked for it in an anthology that he had. Which, to me, is the biggest of compliments, isn't it? He realized that the other pieces were merely Western copies, yes, admittedly. But for one of them, he believed that it was perhaps my version of a Japanese original. Which means that I had got the intonation right or that I had got right whatever it is that is expected of a tanka" (Translation by the author).

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