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ISSUE 15**BORGES TRANSLATIONS OF GERMAN WWI POETRY –  
SPANISH EXPRESSIONISM?**  
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'I walked through the cars: I remember some farmers, a woman in mourning, a young man who was reading with fervor the *Annals* of Tacitus, a soldier who was wounded and happy.'

J. L. Borges (1941), *The Garden of Forking Paths* (cf. Balderston, 1993: 51)

The former passage of Borges' short story *The Garden of Forking Paths* evokes what could have been a daily image in the context of WWI. A widow or a mother in mourning for her lost husband or child, the happy look of a soldier probably just pulled out from the trenches, or a student escaping from reality through readings that connect a European past with its turbulent present. One might be tempted to identify the latter character as a young Borges studying Latin in Geneva, not far away from the trench warfare of Albert or Verdun, in 1916.

Balderston (1993: 51) addresses this analogy by explaining the relationship between Borges and WWI: 'When he learned German, he soon found his way to the powerful war poetry of the expressionists, as is revealed by the poems he chose to translate for the Spanish Ultraist magazine *Cervantes* in 1920'. It was in the early 1920s, at a time when the Hispanic image of Germany was still shaped by the romantic love and nature poetry of Goethe, Hölderlin, and Novalis, when Jorge Luis Borges began translating and publishing recent German Expressionist poems (Eidt, 2008: 115). In doing so, he could be considered a mediator between the two languages and cultures. As pointed out by Boldy (cf. Kristal, 2002: 2), '[t]ranslation for him was inseparable from cultural transmission, and indeed the elaboration of literary texts in general'. As far as his translation techniques are concerned, Kristal further notices that Borges generally

has no scruples about editing the original as he translated. Some of his most frequent practices are to remove redundant, superfluous or inconsequential words or phrases, to cut what might distract attention from another aspect he preferred to highlight, and to add a major or minor nuance not found in the original. (Kristal, 2002: 2)

My aim in this article is to examine the extent to which the former statements (cultural transmission, editing the original) apply to the first-ever translations by Borges, and more especially to his renditions of German Expressionist war poetry into Spanish. A close analysis will focus on the transmission of content and style, which will shed light on how the Argentinian author assimilated Expressionism and made it closer to the Spanish Ultraist movement of the time.

## 2. *Georgie, Switzerland and Spain*

[B]ut you, sweet German tongue,  
I chose and sought alone.  
Vigil and grammar and  
the jungle of declensions,  
dictionaries that never get it right  
precisely, brought me near you.

From J. L. Borges (1940), 'To the German Language'  
(tr. Alastair Reid), in *The Gold of the Tigers. Selected  
Later Poems*, 1979.

Before moving to a literary analysis, it is worth reviewing a few biographical notes about Borges and his contact with German Expressionism in Switzerland and with Ultraism in Spain, which will help us gain a better understanding of his translation work.

Prior to the outbreak of WWI, Borges' father retired due to failing eyesight and the family moved to Europe so that he could receive treatment. The outbreak of the war forced them to stay in Geneva for four years, between 1914 and 1919. Already fluent in Spanish and English, Borges studied French and Latin at his Swiss School. In his free time, an adolescent 'Georgie' (as his family used to call him in jest) enthusiastically applied himself to learning the German language on his own, reading widely on German authors of the time while continuing his reading of authors of other nationalities, especially Hugo, Carlyle, Chesterton and Whitman. In his biography *Borges, A Life*, James Woodall provides us with valuable information about a young *poet-in-process* in Geneva: his study years between 1914 and 1919, his friendships, and his literary interests, war poetry being among them (Woodall, 1996: 31-32):

For Georgie, the war constituted above all a period of restless literary discovery. [...] If Whitman taught him inner rebellion, German Expressionism finally triggered off the poet in him. The Trenches produced the quiet, late-Edwardian protest poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon; the carnage also led – on the other side – to the angular, angry, metaphor-rich outbursts of poets such as Becher, Wilhelm Klemm, Ernst Stadler, and August Stramm. [...] Schooling, reading and, tentatively, writing continued in Geneva until 1918.

Woodall further explains that expressionist work reached Borges in Geneva through magazines and journals, including *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion*. However, he did not pursue his poetic interests in complete solitude. He had a close friend, Maurice Abramowicz, who had aspirations to being a poet and who maintained correspondence with Borges well after his family left Geneva for Lugano in April 1918, and then to Spain in January 1919. In fact, the first mention of Expressionism by Borges in texts and documents can be found in a letter dated 12th Jan 1920 sent to Abramowicz, where he draws an analogy between the German movement and the Spanish Ultraist movement (Borges, 1999: 74):

Tout ce mouvement ultraïste Espagnol est proche parent de  
l'expressionnisme allemand et du futurisme italien. Pour moi le Maître

est toujours Whitman...

All this ultraist Spanish movement is a close relative to German expressionism and Italian futurism. But for me, the master remains Whitman... [my translation]

Readings that Borges mentions in his correspondence with Abramowicz and other friends are, among others, *An Europa* by Johannes R. Becher, *Gottes Geigen* by Kurt Keynicke, *Du: Liebesgedichte* by August Stramm and *Traumschutt* by Wilhelm Klemm (Borges, 1997: 62-74).

The result of Borges' literary discoveries during his stay in Switzerland was a series of publications that began to appear immediately after his family moved to Madrid. It was during this time in Spain when Borges came under the influence of the writer Rafael Cansinos-Asséns – who coined the word *Ultraísmo* in its manifesto – and other Ultraist poets. Borges immersed himself in Spanish literature and contributed

poems, articles, and translations of the Expressionists to the avant-garde literary magazines *Grecia*, *Ultra* and *Cervantes*.

Ultraism was a Hispanic version of Futurism. Ultraist poets admired the Italian Futurists, especially their espousal of speed and dynamism. Their manifesto *Ultra*, published in *Grecia* in its 20th issue, stated a preoccupation with purity of metaphor and rhythm, as well as an avoidance of abstraction (*Grecia* 20, cf. Barrera López, 2002: 47). In an article published in *Grecia* dated 8/8/1920 and entitled 'Lírica expresionista. Síntesis' (*Grecia*, 47; cf. Borges 1997: 52-54), the Argentinian author provides a description of the German literary movement, praising the socially and aesthetically revolutionary nature of *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion*, and emphasising the Expressionists' attitude towards reality as an attempt to transcend it by creating an "ultra-realidad espiritual" (a spiritual ultra-reality). Is Borges' coinage actually aiming at 'connecting' both movements, Expressionism and Ultraism? In the *Ultra* manifesto, Ultraists state their aim to 'redeem' art, not humanity. Ultraist aesthetics focused on the creation of new worlds beyond, and independent of, human reality (D'Ors 1999: 3). In order to achieve this, poets abolished not only all anecdotal content, but, more importantly, reduced texts to their 'primordial element' ("elemento primordial"), the metaphor, often synthesizing several images in one, and deleting all connecting words or phrases. Samson (2011: 164) indicates that Borges himself made these aims clear in a basic catalogue of principles as part of the text "Ultraísmo" in *Textos recobrados* (1997), 128 [my translation]:

1. The return of poetics to their most important element: the metaphor.
2. The omission of intermediate and compound sentences and useless adjectives.
3. The abolition of decorative ornaments, of complicated descriptions and artificial mechanisms.
4. The synthesis of two or more images in one.

As regards German Expressionism, the movement appeared concerned with ethical, social and moral transformation, and not so much with form, at least *on the surface*: 'The Expressionists despised form as an end in itself; yet no other group of poets made it a motif of their poetry as often as they did.' (Pinthus, Ratych, Ley & Conard 1994: 3). Although Expressionism eventually failed at achieving a real transformation of humanity, it nevertheless caused an aesthetic revolution, especially in their choice of themes and form, which must have been noticed by a young enthusiastic Borges, who claimed that Ultraists' "grito de renovación" (cry for renewal) was not only primarily aesthetic, but also profoundly social (Eidt, 2008: 117).

As we shall see in the following literary analysis, Borges' translations represent a variety of poetic styles, and his preference for war poetry appears to be best suited to promote his social concerns to a European southern avant-garde who had remained almost oblivious to the Great War. His translations will help understand

how he sought to accommodate Expressionism within his Ultraist poetics.

### 3. Borges' translations of Stadler, Heynicke and Klemm

The basis of the night.  
The bayonets dream of nuptial encounters  
The world has been lost and the eyes of the dead search  
for it  
Silence howls in the sunken horizons.

J. L. Borges, 'Trinchera' (tr. Balderston, 1993: 52). From  
'Antología Expresionista', *Cervantes*, 10 (1920) (Borges,  
1997: 62)

The above lines from 'Trinchera' (Trench), together with 'Gesta Maximalista' (Maximalist Deed), are examples of war poetry written by Borges between the years 1919 and 1920. The young author had not shared the German war poets' experiences of intergenerational and sociological upheaval, nor did he have any direct involvement with WWI. However, this topic seemed to be special for Borges and exerted a fascination upon him, as *Grecia*, *Ultra* and *Cervantes* saw regular publications of poems 'with either ultraist or expressionist traits' (Running 1981: 199), featuring the theme of war, alongside with different translations of German war poetry.

The following analysis will be focused on three war poems by Stadler, Heynicke and Klemm, authors highly representative of Expressionist poetry, who have not yet attracted so much attention in the scarce literature on Borges' early phase as a translator. This will constitute an attempt to shed some light on the different renditions produced by the Argentinian author, which he sought to accommodate within the context of his own Ultraist poetics at the time.

#### a. Ernst Stadler's 'Der Aufbruch' (See Appendix 1)

Ernst Stadler was born in Colmar, Alsace, in 1883, and died in 1914 as a direct result of the Great War. Although his early influences are located within Symbolism and German Romanticism, the author would soon experience a shift to a more lively poetry with clear influences of Whitman's free verse. Stadler, far from the formal revolution represented by the lyric of Stramm, could be considered a 'conservative' revolutionary. The writer introduced in his lyric different poetic devices such as oxymoron and hyperbole, which would soon become common to most writers of the movement. He preferred a deletion of articles to raise the intensity of expression, including an abundance of verbs of movement to set the expression in motion, a series of images evoking human experience, and different symbols to vindicate vitalism. Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of Stadler's poetic style is the length of his prose, which permits tonal movements and allows for an impression of dynamism and vitality. 'Der Aufbruch', written in 1913 and published in 1914 in a book of the same title, was conceived as an expression of an overflowing vitality. As an intellectual and Alsacian, Stadler devoted his life to serve as a mediator between French and German culture. The war, therefore, as well as a personal threat, represented a turning point in his intellectual and artistic project. His late poetry goes beyond the formal aestheticism prominent in the past, using words that appeal to everyday life and personal experience. On a first reading, 'Der Aufbruch' might be seen as a prelude to the war commencing shortly after. However, Stadler used it as a metaphor for a new human and, ultimately, spiritual trend. Borges has interpreted and maintained the imagery set by Stadler, but there have been formal amendments that seem to hinder the expressionist features.

While Stadler chose verses linked with rhyme and free alternation in order to

generate a restless movement, full of surprises, Borges opted for the intermittent use of free verse and assonant rhymes throughout the poem. One of the most common resources among the poets of literary Expressionism consisted in the removal of articles to give nouns a powerful voice. In this case, Borges has tended to keep them even in cases where the Spanish language system would allow for their removal, as can be seen in line 5 ('Wege zwischen führten alten Bäumen' / "Entre árboles viejos manaron *las* carreteras"). With the same aim of increasing the strength of the expression, Stadler used verbs in the infinitive form devoid of any action, whose strength is diluted in the Spanish version by their conjugation (and thus, personification): the bare form in 'Gemächer *lockten*' has been conjugated as "nos *seducían* alcobas".

Significant formal changes can also be observed in lines 13-14: 'Ich war in Reihen eingeschient, die in den Morgen stießen, Feuer über Helm und Bügel, / Vorwärts, in Blick und Blut die Schlacht, mit vorgehaltne[m] Zügel.' / "Yo me vi empujado en las filas que asaltan mañaneras – fuego sobre los yelmos y cornetas –. / Adelante, la

lucha en la mirada y en la sangre, la rienda suelta..." At first glance, the introduction of dashes may seem insignificant. However, what was intended as short, *anthemic* statements, is rendered as a complex sentence, thereby clarifying and making the event more concrete for the reader. Similarly, the ellipsis at the end of the line lightens the discursive force stated in a verse where the full stop was chosen, indicating a plane beyond the power of the written word, and, ultimately, the poem. The style of Expressionism, with its sober strokes and violence implicit in the words used, seems to appear contested by these two examples – Borges probably intended to increase the lines' connotative force. All in all the use of ellipsis questions the credibility of language, exposing the *Ich* to a possibility beyond what is mentioned in the text.

Significant semantic changes in other lines also stress the contrast between the threatening atmosphere of war and the portrayal of soldiers in both poems. In lines 7,11-12, 'Rüstung' becomes "uniforme" (uniform), 'entkletten' becomes "desnudar" (undress); 'Trompeten-stöße klirren' becomes "irradian las trompetas" (trumpets radiate), and 'die Schlafenden aufspringen' becomes "Y los soldados cantan..." (and soldiers sing). In all these examples, the semantic changes modify the glorious, enthusiastic, patriotic vitality of soldiers facing pre-war preparations. Likewise, in line 10, Borges has decided to eliminate the adjectives 'hart' and 'scharf' qualifying the noun, and opts to transform the sonority of 'klirren' to an image of warmth suggested by the Spanish verb "irradian" (radiate).

Finally, another feature lost in the Spanish version is the sense of upward movement opened in the title by 'auf'. 'Aufbruch' is closely related to 'aufsteigen' in the second line, 'aufstrahlen' in the tenth, and 'Die Schlafenden aufspringen' in the twelfth. Borges has interpreted the latter as "los soldados cantan" (the soldiers sing), losing its literal meaning (the sleepers have risen suddenly). 'Wollüstig' has also undergone semantic changes: 'wollüstig sich in Daunen weicher Traumstunden einzubetten' has been translated as "Y ahogarse en los tapices suaves de las horas de sueños" (and drown into the soft tapestry of the dream hours). Obviously, the meaning of the German word 'wollüstig' (lustful, lascivious) has been lost in translation, ignoring one of the essential themes of Expressionism – eroticism as a literary motif.

The above examples show that, in general, Borges frequently attempts to attenuate the intensity of expression by Stadler, in favour of more grammatical sentences, transforming a fragmentary, timeless experience, where words call to action and movement, into a more stable and concrete one. Such changes seem to transform the portrayed world of imminent war into a more humanly comprehensible experience.

#### b. Kurt Heynicke's 'Hinter der Front' (See Appendix 2)

Kurt Heynicke was born in Silesia in 1891. His first poems appeared in *Der Sturm*, although his association with the other contributors was never close. He fought on the French and Russian fronts during World War I. Heynicke's works have often been

described as showing an evolution towards pacifism as a result of his own awareness of a war that was becoming more and more destructive. He survived the war years and remained active in the literary world, mainly as a novelist and playwright, until his death, in 1985.

In contrast with Stadler's poem, Borges' rendition of Heynicke's 'Hinter der Front' ("Detrás del frente") does not include the main formal alterations discussed earlier: the use of personal pronouns or definite/indefinite articles where the original leaves them out, and the changes in grammatical sentences and word order to make the expression more concrete. Surprisingly, Borges has decided to respect the sentence structure as much as possible in this poem, without suppressing or adding any extra words. When Heynicke chooses to use articles or omit them, Borges renders this exact choice in the Spanish version: 'Winde bringen die Rufe der Schlacht', has been translated literally as "Vientos traen los gritos de la batalla" (line 4); 'Und unsere Seelen tragen ein Wunder' has been rendered in Spanish as "y nuestras almas llevan un milagro". This literal order is especially notable in the last two lines of the poem:

'Frauen und Heimat versinken / Abend', translated as "Mujeres y hogar se hundien / Crepúsculo". In terms of grammaticality, the last two lines would sound rather striking to the Spanish ear given that concrete nouns in Spanish need a definite article. However, Borges' choice clearly aims to reproduce the same effect that perhaps Heynicke sought himself in these lines: to stress the respite of a given day of war, when tiredness and exhaustion leave little room for the uttering of long phrases and explanations. A mere couple of words is all a soldier is able to say after a day in open fire.

So what is different between Borges' version and Heynicke's? In this case, it is worth noting the significant changes of meaning brought about by Borges' choice of words. The poem, contrasting the silent death of bystanders with that of the soldiers, concludes with the word 'Abend' (evening), which Borges renders as "Crepúsculo" (twilight). Borges's translation suggests, perhaps, the Germanic notion of apocalyptic termination, while Heynicke's is evoking the end of a battle after the sun has set, which inevitably evokes a feeling of *Angst* at the fact that the night is close, but the morning is closer. The desolation of the individual soldier is further emphasized with the expression "beben la calma del desierto" (drink the quiet of the desert), translating the original's 'trinken still die Oede'. Here Borges is seeking to reduce the content to its "elemento primordial" (the primordial element), the metaphor which Ultraists claimed as the element to use in order to condense several things into one. Borges does this by synthesizing an image of desolation into a desert of calmness.

Another significant change introduced by Borges' is reflected in the translation of the word 'Heimat' for "hogar". The word 'Heimat', as used by Heynicke, could certainly refer to *Deutschland* as a whole, to the country and everything *inside* its borders (hometown, family, landscape, language etc.). However, the Spanish word "hogar" would certainly not evoke an image of homeland as described before, since its meaning is, literally, 'home' (the physical and emotional area inside a house). 'Heimat' would more appropriately correspond to the word "patria" in Borges' mother tongue. Thus, the decision to remove the 'military' and national context implied by the word "patria" and provide the readers instead with a more humanised version of soldiers thinking of "hogar" and "mujeres" could be seen as a wish to focus more on humanism than militarism.

In short, Borges' principal aim in this poem was to condense and synthesize the reality into metaphors, as the previous examples have shown, a technique which seemed to play a key role in Borges' translation work.

### c. Wilhelm Klemm's 'Schlacht an der Marne' (See Appendix 3)

Wilhelm Klemm was born in Leipzig in 1881. Like Borges, he started writing poetry at a very early age and completed medical studies in 1905. However, he became a publisher upon his father's death, taking over his book business just 4 years later after graduation. During the years of the Great War, he served as a doctor in

Flanders, but was still able to publish his first poetry collection *Gloria! Kriegsgedichte aus dem Feld* (*War poems from the field*) in 1915. His work also appeared in literary journals such as *Der Jugend* and *Simplicissimus*, and later in *Die Aktion*. His poems reflect a very realistic impression of warfare and show how much Klemm was affected by the duties he had to perform at the front.

The selected poem by Klemm, 'Schlacht an der Marne', illustrates certain genuinely expressionist elements in terms of both the specificity of the war theme and the exaltation of the 'fraternal' deed, capturing the combative atmosphere between two neighbouring nations that took place during WWI in the First Battle of the Marne. The conflict resulted in a victory for the Allied army and set the stage for four years of trench warfare on the western front. The realistic depiction of the battle, with such apocalyptic traits (the freezing of the grass to 'green metal', the demon-like features of nature) renders the first part of the poem a metaphor for expressing the mass loss of life. In the second part of the poem, Klemm identifies himself with both countries, sharing the suffering under the firing of the huge 'lion' of war.

Borges' clear favourite in terms of translation was Wilhelm Klemm, to whom he dedicated one exclusive sketch in *Grecia*, and of whom he translated altogether seven poems (García, 2004: 1). The poem selected for the purposes of the present analysis constitutes an exception, since Borges published two versions of it right after his arrival in Buenos Aires: the first one appeared in the journal *Inicial* in 1923, the other one in his work *Inquisiciones*, dated 1925. In contrast with the two examples analysed earlier, Borges' renditions of 'Schlacht der Marne' show more changes and variations, both in terms of structure and content.

The differences between the two versions with regard to the original begin with the title. In the first version, the feminine definite article "la" preceding the word *Marne* is a literal translation of the German 'der', which results in a mistranslation given that names of rivers in Spanish are preceded by the masculine article. Borges must have noticed that such fidelity to the original produces a feeling of estrangement in the Spanish text, which might account for the correction in the second version. The latest version, however, records the most changes and variations in its first six lines with regard to the original, in contrast with the fidelity reflected by the first version in those same verses. While line 1a is more properly referring to "piedras" (stones), 1b prefers "tierra" (land), followed by the plural word "pastos" (pasture), which in the former version was "yerba" (grass). Another major change can be found in Borges' verb choice for the former nouns: "brilla" (2a) or "brillan" (2b) (glow), which clearly deviate from Klemm's 'erstarren' (freeze). As regards adjectives, the German 'dichte' has been rendered in Spanish as "frondosas" (dense) in 3a, and "espesas" (thick) in 3b, which record possible meanings for the German adjective. In the same line, "bajas" (low) (3a) is more literal than "hundidas" (collapsed) (3b), adhering more to the original 'Niedrige'.

Line 5 opens with 'Zwei kolossale Stunden rollen sich auf zu Minuten' (two colossal hours dwindle into minutes), a sentence which brings about an image of accelerating time. However, Borges prefers to slow it down as if underscoring the stunned confusion of the war, inducing a feeling that time is moving at a noticeably slow pace: "Dos horas infinitas van desplegando minutos" (Two infinite hours unfold in minutes).

Interestingly, two of the most remarkable changes of meaning in the poem are located within the second half of it. Firstly, in line 7, where 'zusammen' has been better rendered as "juntas" in 7a (together), rather than "reunidas" (gathered) in 7b. The idea that a German soldier had named almost simultaneously his own country and his enemy in the battlefield, as if this mixed body was his true homeland, might have been more appealing to Borges for his latter version. Secondly, Borges has radically tackled the translation of 'Sechsmal hinaus in das Land / Die Granaten heulen' in line 10, reducing these images to "Una y seis veces. Silencio" (One and six times. Silence) and thus, eliminating any reference to the inner part of the country as well as to the howling of the grenades. Borges' version in these four lines in both poems is much shorter and produces a slightly different effect. In Klemm's original hand-thrown grenades follow the batteries and in the

street in Klemm's original, hand thrown grenades follow the batteries, and in the wake of silence one perceives the infantry's displacements. However, in Borges's two versions, the attack of the infantry appears more focused. He cuts the hurling of grenades by human hands, which would signal the arrival of the infantry, in clear opposition to the meaning of the original, where the infantry has moved away, the immediate danger has passed, but war remains an imminent threat.

Borges' subjectivity is thus visible in the consciousness of time. For him, time appears subjective, distended as a result of the war, entirely and exclusively occupied by it. This conception of time contrasts with a preeminent feature of the Expressionists, which was the transmission of immediacy as a succession of scenes, sounds and facts at the moment they happen. Klemm's poem would verify that the collection of expressions in the mind of the poet, encouraged by external events, is projected into space as a displayed expression of his feelings: the stones begin to move and speak, the grass is frozen into green metal, the heavens threaten to burst... Such mastery of expressiveness reaches its peak in the verse that translates the expressionist ideal of alliance and fraternity, truncated and destroyed by the war: 'Mein Herz ist so groß wie Deutschland und Frankreich zusammen, / Durchbohrt von allen Geschossen der Welt' (My heart is as big as France and Germany together, / drilled by all the bullets of the world). This open declaration of solidarity amid a hostile environment in which it is impossible to discern the military features of the natural element, is conveyed by Borges with a more subjective view of time, rendering the images with a slower pace and assimilating his own poetic voice into the poem. For Borges, hours are not colossal, they are not plummeting over the infantry, but they are raining over them as an infinite element.

#### 4. Borges, an *Ambassador* of Expressionist poetry in Spain

'I was very interested in German Expressionism: I still believe it is superior to other contemporary schools (such as Imagism, Cubism, Futurism, Surrealism, etc.). Some years later in Madrid, I tried the first and unique translations of the Expressionist poets into Spanish.'

From 'Las memorias de Borges' [my translation],  
*La Opinión*, 1000 (17 September 1974) (cf.  
Nahson, 1999: 101)

Borges' efforts to disseminate Expressionism, especially WWI poetry as a sign of European solidarity, were well received by Ultraists such as Cansinos-Asséns and Guillermo de Torre, and became a basis for aesthetic and social regeneration. According to Eidt (2008: 121), Borges modifies or reinterprets the poems he translates in order to demonstrate to his contemporaries that an anti-naturalist desire to surpass the surrounding reality can be effectively combined with profound humanist and social concerns.

In order to achieve that, he introduces three main alterations: the use of definite articles and personal pronouns where the original leaves them out; grammatical sentences and word order where the original is elliptic and fragmentary; the cutting and condensing of words or phrases where the original repeats or expands (*Ibid.*, 2008: 122). Some critics have claimed that Borges' changes in his German translations are errors due to insufficient knowledge of the source language (Vega, 1994; García, 2004). For instance, in his analysis of Ernst Stadler's 'Der Aufbruch', Vega labels differences between Borges' translation and the original as errors and distortions. He attributes the discrepancies to what he considers Borges' 'insecurities in his ability with the source language.' (Vega 1994: 245). While it is true that Borges' was not as proficient in German as he was in English or French at the time he translated the Expressionist poems, some of his changes can be considered clearly intentional. When examples of completely literal translation also appear, as

seen in the previous analysis and more specifically in Heynicke's poem, then the modifications in the other lines appear deliberate, rather than resulting from poetic license or an imperfect command of the German language. In other words, the coexistence of literal and liberal translations indicates that Borges saw these translations as representative of an unambiguous aesthetic as well as a socio-political agenda that he wanted to highlight for his readers.

Regarding Expressionism, the main impact of Borges' translation work lies not in the consequences these translations would have on the literature of the time, but on Borges' own poetic technique. The resources of the German language and specifically of Expressionism become part of his own writing. As Samson notices,

Der Expressionismus war ein Leihmodell. Indem Borges Texte deutschen Avantgardisten ins Spanische übersetzte und die expressionistische Semantik in Gedichten und Essays imitierte,

benutzte er die Bewegung als Anleihe auf der Suche nach eigener literarischer Identität. (Samson 2011: 161-162)

Expressionism was a borrowed model. By translating German avant-garde texts into Spanish and imitating the expressionist semantics in poems and essays, Borges used the movement as a loan in search of his own literary identity. [my translation]

Nevertheless, as a movement in Spain, Ultraism remained an unspecific, eclectic synthesis, as further observed by Samson:

Die Ultraisten setzten allerdings nur selten ihre eigenen ästhetischen Forderungen konsequent um; nach der Beobachtung Gumbrechts haben sie nicht einmal die Vorgaben der von ihnen genau taxierten zentraleuropäischen Avantgarde ernsthaft befolgt. *Ultra* blieb in Spanien eine unspezifische, eklektische Synthesebewegung. (Samson 2011: 164)

The ultraists, however, seldom consistently implement their own aesthetic demands – According to Gumbrecht's observation, they did not even seriously follow the guidelines of the Central European avant-garde, which they carefully assessed. *Ultra* remained an unspecific, eclectic synthesis movement in Spain [my translation].

In March 1921, Borges left Spain to return to Buenos Aires and took with him the Ultraist poetic style, which saw publications in journals such as *Prisma* and *Proa*. However, the Ultraist fever soon passed for Borges. Regretting his first poetic adventure, he started talking about the 'Ultraist mistake', a 'joke played by Cassinos-Asséns' (Borges & Sorrentino, 2001: 26). And thus Ultraism, with its thirst for novelty, its iconoclastic attitude and its obsessive pursuit of the impact of the metaphor eventually left Borges with a feeling that being involved in the movement was, in the end, a frivolous, superficial, sin of youth. With Borges, literary Expressionism left the Spanish literary scene. In fact, most literary histories dismiss any impact of Expressionism in Spain (Eidt 2008: 115). This lack of impact and reception cannot be attributed to the young Borges, who tried hard to disseminate new European trends in Spain and Latin America. It is worth taking into account that when Expressionism came to Spain, it was another *ism* together with Ultraism, Dadaism, Futurism, etc., dedicated to proclaiming manifestos with which to face reality and, ultimately, art. Thanks to Borges, Expressionism was received as a literary witness to the pain caused by the Great War (Soria-Olmedo, 1988: 45), and Borges remained, until the fifties, the only Spanish-language translator of Expressionist war poetry.

## 5. Conclusion

Interviewers: You have said that translations are different perspectives of an object in motion.

Borges: Yes. I suppose they are. But every translation is a new version. And every book is really a rough draft.

'An Interview with Jorge Luis Borges', with John Biguenet and Tom Whalen (1982). From *New Orleans Review*, Fall 1982, 5-14 (cf. Borges 1998: 201)

Borges' idea that translation is a new version was nothing new. Borges' self-criticism as a translator is present in the notes that accompanied his translations of German expressionist poetry. In fact, in those lines the Argentine author did not understand the translated as inferior, but as the result of a confrontation with the author and the former translator of the work, if any, 'so that the text produced in the language can be of higher quality than the original, regardless of its degree of fidelity' (Gargatagli, 1994: 39-40).

Despite the omissions and changes to the original, Borges manages to shape the premise of the translator's invisibility: the text produced in the target language demonstrates a quality equivalent to that conferred by the original. Nevertheless, as noted above, there are certain semantic and formal aspects that Borges has introduced into his versions: The substitution of hard images with milder, beautifying phrases, his tendency to omit what he considered superfluous in some cases, or to add definite and indefinite articles to make events less abstract and more concrete for the reader in other instances. Other features are the slowing down of words and images, and the attenuation of intensity of expression... They all convey a *softer* version of Expressionism, or, as Eidt puts it, they contribute to "Borges' acculturation of Expressionism in Spain" (2008: 116). These infidelities represent a deliberate attempt to disseminate Expressionist poetics in Spain by making its aesthetics more appealing to Spanish poets, amalgamating it with the avant-garde practices of Ultraist poetics. By merging Expressionism with Ultraist aesthetics, employing recognisable techniques while highlighting the Expressionists' concern for human isolation and the need for human solidarity, Borges' translation work pointed Spanish avant-garde poetics in a new direction. Thanks to these translations, the features of literary Expressionism became part of the literature produced by Borges, and in turn, they became part of Hispanic literature.

## 6. Appendices

All Borges poems are taken from J. L. Borges, *Textos recobrados, 1919-1929*. Barcelona, Emecé, 1997.

### Appendix 1

Ernst Stadler: 'Der Aufbruch'. Published in *Der Aufbruch und andere Gedichte*, 1914. From E. Stadler, *Der Aufbruch: Gedichte*, Hamburg, Verlag Heinrich Ellermann, 1962.

- 1 Einmal schon haben Fanfaren mein ungeduldiges Herz blutig gerissen,
- 2 Dass es, aufsteigend wie ein Pferd, sich wütend ins Gezäum verbissen.
- 3 Damals schlug Tambourmarsch den Sturm auf allen Wegen,
- 4 Und herrlichste Musik der Erde hieß uns Kugelregen.
- 5 Dann, plötzlich, stand Leben stille. Wege führten zwischen alten Bäumen.
- 6 Gemächer lockten. Es war süß, zu weilen und sich versäumen,
- 7 Von Wirklichkeit den Leib so wie von staubiger Rüstung zu entketten,
- 8 Wollüstig sich in Daunen weicher Traumstunden einzubetten.

o wohnst du dich in Dämmen weicher Traumstunden einzubetten.

- 9 Aber eines Morgens rollte durch Nebelluft das Echo von Signalen,  
 10 Hart, scharf, wie Schwerthieb pfeifend. Es war, wie wenn im Dunkel plötzlich  
 Lichter aufstrahlen.  
 11 Es war, wie wenn durch Biwakfrühe Trompetenstöße klirren,  
 12 Die Schlafenden aufspringen und die Zelte abschlagen und die Pferde schirren.  
 13 Ich war in Reihen eingeschient, die in den Morgen stießen, Feuer über Helm und  
 Bügel,  
 14 Vorwärts, in Blick und Blut die Schlacht, mit vorgehaltne Zügel.  
 15 Vielleicht würden uns am Abend Siegesmärsche umstreichen,  
 16 Vielleicht lägen wir irgendwo ausgestreckt unter Leichen.  
 17 Aber vor dem Erraffen und vor dem Versinken 18 Würden unsre Augen sich an  
 Welt und Sonne satt und glühend trinken.

J. L. Borges (tr.): "El arranque". Published in 'Antología expresionista', *Cervantes*, 10 (October 1920).

- 1 Ya una vez las trompetas desgarraron en sangre mi corazón impaciente.  
 2 Hasta que éste, saltando como un potro, tascó furioso el freno.  
 3 En ese tiempo los tambores llamaron al asalto en todos los senderos  
 4 Y la música de la lluvia de balas fue para nosotros la más magnífica del  
 universo.  
 5 Luego de pronto se detuvo la vida. Entre árboles viejos manaron las carreteras.  
 6 Nos seducían alcobas. Era dulce detenerse y perderse,  
 7 Desnudar la realidad al cuerpo como de un uniforme polvoriento.  
 8 Y ahogarse en los tapices suaves de las horas de sueños.  
 9 Pero una mañana el eco de señales arremetió la niebla,  
 10 Silbando cual un sable. Como cuando en la obscuridad de pronto luces chorrean,  
 11 Como cuando en el vivac de mañana irradian las trompetas  
 12 Y los soldados cantan y ensillan los caballos y levantan las tiendas.  
 13 Yo me vi empujado en las filas que asaltan mañaneras –fuego sobre los yelmos  
 y cornetas–.  
 14 Adelante, la lucha en la Mirada y en la sangre, la rienda suelta...  
 15 Tal vez aquella noche nos acariciarían marchas triunfales  
 16 Tal vez en cualquier parte yaceríamos tendidos entre cadáveres  
 17 Poco antes del tumulto y antes de hundirnos  
 17 Nuestros ojos, borrachos de tierra y sol ardiente, se saciarían.

### Appendix 2

Kurt Heynicke: 'Hinter der Front'. Published in *Der Sturm* 10 (4) (July 1919).

- 1 Wir sterben in die Einsamkeit  
 2 Die müden Augen trinken still die Oede  
 3 weglängs steht sie an den Kreuzen  
 4 Winde bringen die Rufe der Schlacht  
 5 Im Osten flackern Fackeln,  
 6 Steinern sind unsere Hände  
 7 Und unsere Seelen tragen ein Wunder  
 8 Frauen und Heimat versinken  
 9 Abend

J. L. Borges (tr.): "Detrás del frente". Published in 'Lírica Expresionista. Síntesis',  
 (October 1920).

*Grecia*, 4/ (August 1920).

- 1 Nos morimos en la soledad
- 2 Los ojos cansados beben en la calma del desierto
- 3 a lo largo del camino se detiene en las cruces
- 4 Vientos traen los gritos de la batalla
- 5 en el oriente flamean antorchas
- 6 pétreas son nuestras manos
- 7 y nuestras almas llevan un milagro
- 8 Mujeres y hogar se hunden
- 9 Crepúsculo

### *Appendix 3*

Wilhelm Klemm: 'Schlacht an der Marne'.

- 1 Langsam beginnen die Steine sich zu bewegen und zu reden.
- 2 Die Gräser erstarren zu grünem Metall. Die Wälder,
- 3 Niedrige, dichte Verstecke, fressen ferne Kolonnen.
- 4 Der Himmel das kalkweiße Geheimnis, droht zu bersten.
- 5 Zwei kolossale Stunden rollen sich auf zu Minuten.
- 6 Der leere Horizont bläht sich empor.
- 7 Mein Herz ist so groß wie Deutschland und Frankreich zusammen,
- 8 Durchbohrt von allen Geschossen der Welt.
- 9 Die Batterie erhebt ihre Löwenstimme
- 10 Sechsmal hinaus in das Land. Die Granaten heulen.
- 11 Stille. In der Ferne brodeln das Feuer der Infanterie,
- 12 Tagelang, wochenlang.

(First version, "a")

J. L. Borges (tr.): "La Batalla de Marne". In 'Acerca del Expresionismo', *Inicial*, 3 (December 1923).

- 1a Poco a poco la tierra empieza a hablar y a moverse.
- 2a La yerba brilla como un verde metal. Las selvas,
- 3a Talanqueras hundidas y frondosas, tragan columnas lejanas.
- 4a Lívido secreto, va a estallar todo el cielo.
- 5a Dos horas infinitas van desplegando minutos.
- 6a [...] (\*)
- 7a Mi corazón es amplio como Alemania y Francia reunidas.
- 8a Y lo atraviesan todas las balas del mundo.
- 9a La batería levanta su voz de león.
- 10a Una y seis veces. Silencio.
- 11a En lo lejos arde la infantería.
- 12a Durante días. Durante semanas también.

(\*) A line is missing in the original publication, presumably due to a printing error.

(Second version, "b")

J. L. Borges (tr.): "La Batalla de Marne". Published in *Inquisiciones*, 1925.

- 1b Poco a poco las piedras dan en hablar y en moverse.

- 2b Los pastos brillan como un verde metal. Las selvas,  
 3b talanqueras bajas y espesas, tragan columnas lejanas.  
 4b Encalado secreto, amaga estallar todo el cielo.  
 5b Dos horas infinitas van desplegando minutos.  
 6b Hinchado asciendo el horizonte vacío.  
 7b Mi corazón es amplio como Alemania y Francia reunidas.  
 8b lo atraviesan todas las balas del mundo.  
 9b La batería levanta su voz de león.  
 10b Una y seis veces. Silencio.  
 11b En lo lejos hierve la infantería.  
 12b Durante días. Durante semanas también.

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