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How Literal is the 1972 Translation Into English of J.L. Borges' *Historia Universal de la Infamia*?

Marcelo Sánchez, European Central Bank, Germany*

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes A Universal History of Infamy, the 1972 translation into English of Historia Universal de la Infamia (hereinafter, HUI). While assessing this translation's degree of literality, the authors also characterize how the translation project at stake evolved. Initially, J.L. Borges would have planned to rewrite the book in English (in 1968, with the help of his translator Norman di Giovanni). He later, in 1971, contented himself with attenuating the baroque style of the original prose and ultimately gave up all collaboration. The bulk of the translation was then left to di Giovanni. Textual analysis, combined with data on the translation/publication context of some HUI compositions, allow the authors to explore the hypothesis that the higher fidelity of certain translations is linked to a possible Borges collaboration. While sticking to his overall goal of making the prose of the original flow, di Giovanni's translation often recomposed sentences and incurred interpretation errors.

KEYWORDS

Jorge Luis Borges, Literality, Norman Thomas di Giovanni, Translation Criticism, Translation Norm, Universal History of Infamy

INTRODUCTION

In 1972, the first translation into English of Borges' book *Historia universal de la infamia* (hereinafter, HUI) was published with the title *A Universal History of Infamy*. HUI had first been published in Spanish in 1935. Translating it into English was considered in 1968 by the author and the translator (Norman Thomas di Giovanni); both would have agreed to do the work in collaboration. The joint translation began in 1971, but Borges soon decided to suspend his collaboration. This means that the finally published translation of HUI was the responsibility of di Giovanni, who is the only one to get credit for the translation. Some of the translations included in *A Universal History of Infamy* had appeared in magazines in the previous months.[1]

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HUI is an important book in Borges' literary career. It contains his first short story ("Hombre de la esquina rosada") and other narrative pieces. The book represents a first step in the direction of short story writing, an activity which Borges will concentrate on during 1939-53, as documented in his two most celebrated books: *Ficciones* (1st ed.: 1944) and *El Aleph* (1st ed.: 1949).

Di Giovanni (2003) claimed to have convinced Borges, in the (northern) spring of 1968, to translate HUI together. His argument was that anyone could translate the book, but that they would do a better job. Instead, what, according to di Giovanni, convinced Borges was the possibility of not just translating, but rewriting HUI. Unlike the poems of the 1920s, drastically altered (in Spanish) by Borges between 1943 and 1977,[2] Borges thought that it was not a good idea to do the same with early prose. The essays of the 1920s were suppressed and the prose of the period 1930-5 basically preserved, with qualms.

The present article contributes to assessing the quality of di Giovanni's published HUI translation. We adopt a rather simple approach to checking how faithfully the translation reproduces the original text. We concentrate almost exclusively in identifying textual innovations by the translator. This approach is justified in the present case. On the one hand, the literature on the nature of the translations of Borges' work is still in its infancy, so it is worth devoting time to analyzing partial aspects of that huge corpus.[3] On the other, di Giovanni's translation tends to deviate from literality. Although the clear focus of our study is translation criticism, we also keep an eye on how this translation project evolved.

In assessing the degree of literality with which di Giovanni translated HUI, this article owes much to translation studies, with their emphasis on how translating a text into another language transforms its meaning.[4] The fact that we concentrate on di Giovanni's limitations should not be interpreted to mean that his translation is not a potentially valuable reading of the original – one that reflects a meaningful approach to translation. We do abstract here from characterizing the full scope of this HUI translation. We only mention in passing contextual aspects such as whether the 1972 HUI translation follows a norm that seeks to adapt Borges to the market of the receiving country.[5]

On top of simplicity, one of the advantages of our approach is transparency. As reference points we report both the text in Spanish and our own literal translation into English. The interested reader can modify the reference translation as she deems fit, and then adjust the judgements accordingly. Our basic analysis should be expanded by future research, which may consider complementary areas such as di Giovanni's fluidity of discourse, his achievements in the choice of words and syntax, his apparent goals (including his text's suitability to the target audience) and a comparison with Andrew Hurley's rendition of the same book (Borges, 1998). Such extensions may draw on the developments seen in translation studies over the last decades (see e.g., Munday et al., 2022), including the descriptive stance of funcionalist/communicative or sociocultural approaches, as well as recent cognitive analyses.

The lack of substantial critical analysis of Borges' work in translation has not prevented opinions about this matter from being aired in relatively recent times. Di Giovanni has been in the center of attention, with Venuti's (1995) insights being followed by Howard's (1997) somewhat more detailed study. Di Giovanni's versions began to be seen as an attempt to remove the complications of Borges' style, "substituting in their place a kind of transparent, idiomatic expression that he [di Giovanni] thought would be more accessible to North-American readers." (Howard, 1997, 44; our clarification). Sticking to HUI, here we will uncover other features of di Giovanni's translations; throughout, we identify that the examples discussed fall into three main categories: interpretation errors and the recomposition and lengthening of sentences. Hurley, who published the second translation of HUI into English in 1998, has said that he wanted to be respectful of Borges' style, and not sacrifice it for the sake of a supposed fluency (Hurley, 1999); below we shall mention MacAdam's (2013) opinion contrary to the fidelity of Hurley's translation of a HUI short story.[6]

MacAdam's (2013) approach is closest to ours, and not only because he concentrates on a HUI piece. When considering two translations of that piece, his emphasis is not as much on variety as it is on a common trait that the critic regrets: lack of literality. Even in his seminal earlier article (MacAdam, 1975),[7] his central message – that translation, like metaphor, is an intrinsically creative

endeavor – cannot prevent one from detecting his clear critical preferences, and this not only when MacAdam enumerates flagrant errors.[7]

In our analysis of di Giovanni's translation, we explore a hypothesis about the possible role that an early (and later interrupted) collaboration by Borges might have played. We know that a few HUI compositions were translated in collaboration, which allows us to study these with greater certainty. Given that that these translated pieces do not exhibit many clear deviations from the original, we formulate the hypothesis that the HUI compositions more faithfully translated by di Giovanni are associated with some participation of Borges. The most useful supplementary information that we have to assess this hypothesis are some statements from both collaborators and the data on whether the translated compositions were published in a magazine before appearing in *A Universal History of Infamy*. As we go along, we evaluate whether the hypothesis has some value.

The structure of this article is as follows. We begin by looking at the translations of two HUI pieces that pre-exist the brief collaboration on the book between di Giovanni and Borges in 1971. These translations, when published in 1970-1, were acknowledged to be a joint work. We then discuss the brief attempt at collaboration, aborted in the (southern) winter of 1971. The remainder of the analysis is devoted to other HUI compositions. In the case of "El atroz redentor Lazarus Morell" ("The Dread Redeemer Lazarus Morell"), we cite some criticisms that a Borges translator (MacAdam, 2013) made of di Giovanni's translation. Always focusing on literality, we then review the translations of two short stories that are quoted verbatim and commented on by di Giovanni (2003). Given that Borges refers in January 1972 to the collaborative work on HUI with di Giovanni, we then deal with this book's translated compositions that were published in the previous months (Oct. 1971 – Jan. 1972). Before offering our conclusions, we comment on the remaining HUI translations collected in the 1972 volume.

PRE-EXISTING TRANSLATIONS

A special case is the short story "Hombre de la esquina rosada."[8] The first translation of "Hombre" into English was published by di Giovanni and Borges in a collection of short stories (Borges, 1970). It is not a very literal version, given the language difficulties (slang and other *criollo* twists) that the original presents. Although the translation does not aspire to replicate the brilliance of Borges' prose, it avoids interpretation errors, sentence lengthening and the alteration of sentence order.

In the (northern) spring of 1971, during a seminar attended by graduate students and professors from Columbia University (di Giovanni et al., 1973, 112-3), Borges and di Giovanni agreed that the translation of "Hombre" from 1970 suffered from many colloquial expressions (North-American "slang"); di Giovanni added that he would take it upon himself to purify the translation from slang, with a view to its publication in the planned volume of HUI in English (back then, agreed as a collaboration between the two). Indeed, the second translation of the story, published by di Giovanni when he was no longer collaborating with Borges, was aimed at attenuating the presence of slang.

HUI (in di Giovanni's version) included two short prose pieces whose translation pre-existed the activities devoted to translating the book in 1971. Both compositions had appeared in Spanish in HUI (1935 and 1954 editions), but meanwhile they had also come out in *El hacedor* (1960). Those compositions are called in English "The Generous Enemy" and "Of Exactitude in Science"; the first was faithfully rendered by W. S. Merwin; the translation of the second – the result of a collaboration between di Giovanni and Borges – was quite faithful.[9]

JOINT TRANSLATION AND BREAK-UP

HUI's joint translation project did not prosper, but it did begin to develop. The only more or less precise date that we have in this regard is that the short story "El tintorero enmascarado

Hákim de Merv" ("The Masked Dyer, Hakim of Merv") was translated in the (southern) winter of 1971 (di Giovanni, 2003, 129). It was in this same period that all collaboration to translate was definitively interrupted; the decision, which Borges communicated to di Giovanni on July 10, 1971, seems to have been made a few days before (Bioy Casares, 2006, entries from 7-10/12/1971).[10] The reasons for the break-up fall into two categories: a) personal issues, and b) the time demanded of Borges by current translations (and the time that future ones threatened to demand).

Di Giovanni's (2003) attempt at indicating when HUI translation started is unreliable:

It was not until four years and four books later [counting from the northern spring of 1968] that the project would be started. We found out then what I had known all along – that the drastic measure of rewriting the book was unnecessary. (p. 118, our clarification)

If we count "four years" from 1968, that places us in 1972, by which time the collaboration was already interrupted.[11] Even so, the quote above helps us date the start of the joint project in 1971, not long before its abrupt end. It is also interesting that the objective of the project had changed: in 1968 Borges wanted not simply to translate, but to rewrite HUI; in 1971 "rewriting" – always according to di Giovanni – had become "unnecessary." However, the fact that Borges was leaving the project raises the question of whether, for him, the HUI rewrite (in English) was still desirable, but so time-consuming that it was better to abandon it.

To understand Borges' break-up with di Giovanni, it is convenient to take into account the three years (1968-71) that Borges had been working with di Giovanni on the translations of his works: a poetry anthology (it would appear in 1972 as *Selected Poems 1923-1967*); *El libro de los seres imaginarios (The Book of Imaginary Beings)* (1967; translation published in 1969); the short stories – and an autobiographical essay – that appeared in Borges (1970); the short stories from *El informe de Brodie (Doctor Brodie's Report)* (1970; translations collected as a book in 1972). As for *Elogio de la sombra (In Praise of Darkness)* (1969; translation published in 1974), the book's translation was attributed to di Giovanni, although several of the compositions included had been published in previous years as a collaborative work, either in Borges (1970) or in magazines.

After three years of collaborating on translations, Borges would have demanded that a new translation project held at least the same interest for him – if not more – than the previous ones. HUI's baroque style was not a favorable factor in this regard. To make things worse, throughout those years Borges had become aware of di Giovanni's limitations as a translator.[12] He was not enthusiastic about the work method either: in the (northern) spring of 1971 (that is, shortly before the break-up), during the aforementioned seminar, the differences between Borges and di Giovanni became evident; the first went so far as to ironize about the latter's contribution:

He [di Giovanni] prepares [the work] in the morning and we translate together in the afternoon. Well, he's doing all the work, really. (di Giovanni et al., 1973, p. 95, our clarifications)

At the time of the break-up there were ongoing translations of short stories written by Borges and Bioy Casares, from *Crónicas de Bustos Domecq (Chronicles of Bustos Domecq)* (1967). Di Giovanni asked Bioy for help. Bioy (1972) referred:

Half of the book is translated by Borges, Di Giovanni and myself; the rest will have to be translated only by Di Giovanni. Di Giovanni asks me: "What exactly does configure mean?" He had told me that he had some doubts: he forces me to translate the second half of a story for him (the first was already translated by JLB, ABC, and DG at a short trot behind).

THE PUBLISHED TRANSLATION OF HUI

In 1972 di Giovanni published his translation, *A Universal History of Infamy.* Already in May 1972 the translation would have been finished, since the volume was then in production (di Giovanni, 2003, p. 117). The book does not indicate the participation of Borges, of whom di Giovanni (2003) would later say that he had taken a "large hand" in the translation (p. 117).

In January 1972 Borges (2013) considered himself co-responsible for the translation to a certain extent. Speaking of HUI he stated:

I did it, on the other hand, in a too baroque style. I toned it down a bit later, especially when I did… when I helped Norman Thomas di Giovanni translate the stories into English. So I smoothed out a bit the rough edges, the difficulties.

This gives the impression that Borges had given up on rewriting HUI, but at least he had contributed to "attenuating" the original baroque style. By the time Borges made this statement, di Giovanni had recently published the first new translations of HUI, which did not acknowledge any Borges collaboration: that of the short story "El impostor inverosímil Tom Castro" ("Tom Castro, the Implausible Impostor") (*Harper's Magazine*, Oct. 1971), and those of five of the six short prose pieces grouped – according to *Obras Completas* – in the "Etcétera" ("Etcetera") section of HUI (*The New Yorker*, Jan. 1, 1972).[13] Below we will address the question of whether these are the translations that Borges spoke of in January 1972.

Di Giovanni (2003) reproduced the entire translation of "The Disinterested Killer Bill Harrigan," signed just by him, and two fragments of his translation of "The Masked Dyer, Hakim of Merv." He stated that Borges had collaborated in the translation of the second story (ch. 2). Below we will consider whether Borges collaborated in "Bill Harrigan" as well.

Two of the HUI stories translated by di Giovanni were not published in magazines before appearing in book form. This would suggest that Borges is less likely to have participated in these translations, or that if he did collaborate, his participation would not have been considerable. The two stories in question are "The Dread Redeemer Lazarus Morell," which opens HUI, and "El incivil Maestro de Ceremonias Kotsuké no Suké" ("The Insulting Master of Etiquette Kôtsuké no Suké"). The idea that Borges did not collaborate in the first finds some indirect confirmation in the adverse criticism that di Giovanni's version received from the translator Alfred MacAdam.

PROBLEMS WITH THE TRANSLATION OF "LAZARUS MORELL"

MacAdam (2013) is especially critical of the following decisions by di Giovanni:[14]

1. "Odd philanthropic twist" (1975, p. 19), for "curious variation of a philanthropist" {"curiosa variación de un filántropo"} (1974, p. 295);
2. "Broad-bosomed river" (1975, p. 20), for "broad-chested river" {"río de pecho ancho"} (1974, p. 295);
3. "River of muddy waters" (1975, p. 20), for "river of mulatto waters" {"río de aguas mulatas"} (1974, p. 296);
4. "From time immemorial, so much muck has built up a delta" (1975, p. 20), for "So much venerable and ancient garbage has built a delta" {"Tanta basura venerable y antigua ha construido un delta"} (1974, p. 296);
5. "Snarling packs of hounds" (1975, p. 21), for "strong prey dogs" {"fuertes perros de presa"} (1974, p. 296);
6. "The soil, overworked and mismanaged by this greedy cultivation" (1975, p. 22), for "The land, fatigued and handled by that impatient culture" {"La tierra, fatigada y manoseada por esa cultura impaciente"} (1974, p. 296).

MacAdam (2013) also criticizes the refined tone of the phrase: "Nor was this time missed by my assistant Crenshaw and his confederates, for they were outside rounding up all the hearers' horses." (1975, p. 23), for "Crenshaw and the companions did not waste that time either, since all the horses in the auditorium were herded." {"Tampoco malgastaron ese tiempo Crenshaw y los compañeros, porque se arrearon todos los caballos del auditorio."} (1974, p. 297).

We consider these criticisms pertinent. In the case of item (4), it must be said that the way in which the original combines three contiguous and related nouns associated with "mud" and "garbage" (namely, "fango," "basura" y "barro") is far from perfect, which justifies some alterations when translating the sentence; moreover, the adjective "venerable" is excessive, so its removal by di Giovanni is a defensible decision.

MacAdam (2013) concludes that the translation of "Lazarus Morell" by di Giovanni and that of Hurley in Borges (1998):

Leave us wondering why they strayed so far from Borges' wonderful Spanish, when a more literal rendition would have preserved Borges' odd phrasing and given us readers a better idea of the original.

However, in the subsequent panel discussion, MacAdam raises doubts about whether the deviations from the original arose from Borges' possible intervention in the translation. Our opinion is that "Lazarus Morell" presents the usual defects of the translations that di Giovanni did on his own, thereby suggesting that Borges did not participate.

THE CASES OF "BILL HARRIGAN" AND "HAKIM OF MERV"

We now analyze the citations that di Giovanni (2003) made of his translations of HUI (ch. 2). We begin with the two fragments of "The Masked Dyer, Hakim of Merv" (some twenty-five lines in total), since this story is the only one to which di Giovanni explicitly attributed a collaboration with Borges in 1971. The translation of the fragments is faithful, unlike that of "Lazarus Morell"; however, it is striking that the "God" {"Dios"} (1974, p. 327) that is at the basis of Hakim's cosmogony is translated as "god" (1975, p. 83). The rest of the translation (i.e., the part not cited in di Giovanni, 2003) suffers from some differences with respect to the original (for example, due to his eagerness to clarify some things or to alter sentence order). In addition, di Giovanni sometimes makes a mistake, as when he calls "caravan traders" (1975, p. 80) the group that Borges lists as "slaves, beggars, horse merchants, camel thieves and butchers" {"esclavos, limosneros, chalanes, ladrones de camellos y matarifes"} (1974, p. 325). But in general, the translation of the story is quite faithful. One could attribute this fidelity to Borges' contribution.

In contrast, in the translation of "El asesino desinteresado Bill Harrigan" ("The Disinterested Killer Bill Harrigan") – cited in its entirety by di Giovanni (2003, ch. 2) – we detect many translation innovations, which could be linked to a lack of participation by Borges. For instance:

1. "Plenty [of practice…] [s]hooting tin cans and men" (1975, p. 66, our clarification), for "more [aim], killing men" {"más [puntería], matando hombres"} (1974, p. 319, our clarification);
2. "On a porch" (1975, 67), for "in a corridor" {"en un corredor"} (1974, p. 319).

Innovation (2) is especially serious since the original suggests the precautions Bill's killer takes: he shoots him from "a corridor" (the effect is lost if the killer risks waiting for Bill in sight of him, "on a porch").

When translating "Bill Harrigan," there are many times that di Giovanni impoverishes the style or simply does not understand the original. For example:

1. "Treacherous as a bull rattler"[15] (1975, p. 63), for "the one always behaving as a snake" {"el siempre aculebrado"} (1974, p. 317);
2. "Showy dead man" (1975, p. 65), for "luxurious dead man" {"muerto lujoso"} (1974, p. 318);
3. "The extravagance of utter recklessness" (1975, p. 66), for "that luxury: courage" {"ese lujo: el coraje"} (1974, p. 319).

These three items, like item (2) already mentioned, contribute to blurring the characterization of the hero.

At the beginning of the short story di Giovanni does not respect the repetition of the word "lands" {"tierras"} (1974, p. 316), using instead two different expressions ("desert wilds" and "a country"). He also avoids Borges' odd use of adjectives, as when he translates "a pair of six-guns at his side" (1975, p. 64), for "two side pistols" {"dos pistolas laterales"} (1974, p. 318).[16] Finally, the translation systematically lengthens the original text, wasting the opportunity that English offers to condense.

THE FIRST 1971 TRANSLATIONS TO BE PUBLISHED

In January 1972 Borges said in an interview that by collaborating with di Giovanni, he had helped to tone down some of HUI's baroque excesses. Until that date, of the HUI compositions translated in 1971, only the short story "Tom Castro, the Implausible Impostor" and various short prose pieces had already been published. These do not seem to be the translations that Borges had in mind when he spoke favorably in January 1972, since they present some possibly negative traits. In addition to the impoverished style, the meaning of the sentences is systematically altered and some errors are introduced.

In the first section of "Tom Castro," we find the following examples, among the many interventions by di Giovanni tending to avoid a literal translation:

1. "As an individual, he was at once quiet and dull." (1975, p. 32), for "He was a person of calm idiocy." {"Era persona de una sosegada idiotez."} (1974, p. 301);
2. "Bogle…had about him that air of authority and assurance, that architectural solidity" (1975, p. 32), for "Bogle…had that restful and monumental air, that solidity as of an engineering work" {"Bogle…tenía ese aire reposado y monumental, esa solidez como de obra de ingeniería"} (1974, p. 301);
3. "He was a well-mannered, upright person, whose primeval African lusts had been carefully channeled by the uses and misuses of Calvinism" (1975, p. 32), for "He was a restrained and decent man, with the old African appetites much corrected by the use and abuse of Calvinism" {"Era un varón morigerado y decente, con los antiguos apetitos africanos muy corregidos por el uso y abuso del calvinismo"} (1974, p. 301);
4. "Orton first saw him early one evening on a deserted Sydney street corner, steeling himself against this quite unlikely death" (1975, p. 33), for "Orton saw him one evening on a run-down Sydney street corner, building his decision to avoid imaginary death" {"Orton lo vio un atardecer en una desmantelada esquina de Sydney, creándose decisión para sortear la imaginaria muerte"} (1974, p. 301).

In the case of the short prose pieces translated by di Giovanni (and published on Jan. 1, 1972), the translator opts for a non-literal version in each sentence, altering the meaning or lengthening the sentences.[17] For example, in "Un teólogo en la muerte" ("A Theologian in Death"):

1. "He wondered at these changes, but he went on writing about faith while denying charity, and was so persistent in this exclusion that he was suddenly transported underground to

a kind of workhouse" (1975, p. 104), for "He continued, however, writing, but since he persisted in denying charity, they transferred him to an underground workshop" {"Seguía, sin embargo, escribiendo, pero como persistía en la negación de la caridad, lo trasladaron a un taller subterráneo"} (1974, p. 335);

2. "The only difficulty was that what he wrote one day he could not see the next" (1975, p. 105), for "but the pages written today would appear erased tomorrow" {"pero las páginas escritas hoy aparecían mañana borradas"} (1974, p. 336).

Judging by their style, the first translations of HUI to be published after the break-up show some lack of literality, which might be attributed to lack of collaboration from Borges. The translations of "Tom Castro" and "Etcetera" would not be those which Borges referred favorably to in January 1972; perhaps he was thinking of his collaboration on the (then unpublished) translation of "Hakim of Merv."

THE REMAINING TRANSLATIONS

As with "Lazarus Morell," di Giovanni's translation of "The Insulting Master of Etiquette Kôtsuké no Suké" was not published in a magazine before appearing in HUI's English version. This would suggest that Borges did not collaborate on it as a translator, which is consistent with the textual analysis. The translation of "Kotsuké no Suké" is subject to frequent changes from the original. Especially harmful are the changes that concur here:

"Twenty-three hundred years (some of them mythological) of polished manners had nervously defined the ceremonies to be observed upon the occasion" (1975, p. 70), for "Two thousand three hundred years of courtesy (some mythological) had complicated distressingly the ceremonial reception" {"Dos mil trescientos años de cortesía (algunos mitológicos), habían complicado angustiosamente el ceremonial de la recepción"} (1974, p. 320).

We note that the style is damaged by the repetition of "of," not observed in the original. The sentence is somewhat lengthened. Di Giovanni does not seem to understand the meaning of "complicado angustiosamente." One point in favor of the translation is having removed the comma in the original, which we attribute to a permanent typographical error.

Another innovative translation, which introduces several significant errors, is that of the "Prólogo a la edición de 1954" ("Preface to the 1954 edition"). This piece was published in a magazine before appearing in book form.[18] Whereas Borges avoids combining synonyms, di Giovanni combines "burlesque" and "parody" in one phrase (1975, 11). Other innovations of this translation are:

1. "The final stage of all styles is baroque when that style only too obviously exhibits or overdoes its own tricks" (1975, p. 11), for "the final stage of all art is baroque, when it exhibits and squanders its means" {"es barroca la etapa final de todo arte, cuando éste exhibe y dilapida sus medios"} (1974, p. 291);
2. "Without any aesthetic justification whatever" (1975, p. 12), for "sometimes without aesthetic justification" {"sin justificación estética alguna vez"} (1974, p. 291).

Example (1) shows that di Giovanni does not understand how Borges punctuates, thereby missing the idea in the original that the baroque is an inevitable decadent phase of all art. Furthermore, the translator does not understand the difference between art and style (or styles). Di Giovanni's mention of "tricks" is not faithful in the present context, since it suggests – unlike Borges' text – that all art (and not only that degenerating into baroque) is prone to questionable artificiality.

In contrast to the two previous pieces, the translation of "La viuda Ching, pirata" ("The Widow Ching, Lady Pirate") is quite literal, suggesting a possible Borges involvement. Even so,

the first sentence of the translation introduces innovations, some of them unfortunate, as noted in these two fragments:

1. "Painful memories of the neighborhood production of some faded musical comedy" (1975, p. 41), for "a memory that is vaguely uncomfortable: that of an already faded zarzuela" {"un recuerdo que es vagamente incómodo: el de una ya descolorida zarzuela"} (1974, p. 306);
2. "Housewives posing as pirates and hoofing it on a briny deep of unmistakable cardboard," for "maids, who played choreographic pirates in seas of remarkable cardboard" {"mucamas, que hacían de piratas coreográficas en mares de notable cartón"} (1974, p. 306).

The translation of the very brief prose "Un doble de Mahoma" ("A Double for Mohammed") is also faithful; towards the end, however, di Giovanni introduces variants: "I heard him utter these words…; and thereupon he sank down again" (1975, p. 128), for "He was able to articulate the words..., and he immediately sank" {"Pudo articular las palabras…, e inmediatamente se hundió"} (1974, p. 343).

Finally, the translation of "Monk Eastman, Purveyor of Iniquities" is a case in between.[19] It could be that Borges' collaboration on this translation was left unfinished, and that di Giovanni later felt less constrained and introduced innovations. In the knife duel of the first sentence, we read: "he brings the unaccompanied dance to a close on the ground with his death" (1975, p. 51), for "he brings the dance without music to a close with his horizontal death" {"cierra con su muerte horizontal el baile sin música"} (1974, p. 311). The translator distances himself from the poetic original, trying to be explanatory and introducing an ambiguity ("unaccompanied") that has no place in the source text (for Borges, this dance clearly lacks music, not human company). Later, di Giovanni translates: "a kosher restaurant" and "ritually slaughtered calves" (1975, p. 54), for "restaurant of those who announce Kosher" {"restaurant de los que anuncian Kosher"} and "calves slaughtered with righteousness" {"terneras degolladas con rectitud"} (1974, p. 312), respectively.

CONCLUSION

The collaboration with Borges gave di Giovanni the confidence to translate freely (di Giovanni et al., 1973, p. 114). Judging from the few translations of HUI pieces that date from before the break-up, however, the collaboration would seem to have kept di Giovanni close to relatively accurate and error-free translations. Even in these cases, the translator aimed at simplifying and/or explaining the text, with a view to the North American market. Frequent, daring and at times unfortunate are the textual interventions di Giovanni tended to introduce in other HUI pieces, which might signal that his collaboration with Borges had already ended. Di Giovanni was aware of the demands that innovative translations have to meet: "Of course, the freer you are the better you have to be" (di Giovanni et al., 1973, p. 114). Very soon, Borges began to doubt that his collaborator had the necessary qualities; he remembered with irony that di Giovanni (1981) had told him: "My version is superior to the text in Spanish" (p. 118).[20]

There are great doubts about how much Borges contributed to the first English translation of HUI. If he harbored the idea of rewriting the book in English in 1968 (with di Giovanni's help), by the time the collaboration stopped in 1971[21] Borges believed he had hardly contributed to attenuating some of the baroque excesses of the original. One of the few translated HUI compositions that would have benefited from this toning down is "Hakim of Merv," which is also the only translation in question to which di Giovanni attributed a collaboration of Borges. The translation of "The Widow Ching" is the only other short story in the book which has been faithfully translated. To this could be added a couple of shorter pieces.

After the break-up with Borges, di Giovanni had to take charge of the bulk of HUI's translation. This might be associated with some deviations from literality, such as interpretation errors, sentence

lengthening and the alteration of sentence order. To the extent that the collaboration with Borges were deemed conducive to faithfulness, one could then not confirm di Giovanni's claim that Borges had taken a "large hand" in the translation. Of HUI's opening composition, "Lazarus Morell" (whose translation by di Giovanni was not published in a magazine), MacAdam (2013) wished the translator had offered a more literal version, preserving Borges' eccentric prose. The original style of the short story "Bill Harrigan" is a mix between baroque and elliptical; its translation into English – which di Giovanni (2003) transcribed in its entirety – lengthens a large number of sentences, and the whole loses much of its initial grace. Most of the other HUI translations exhibit similar traits, including the first compositions to be translated in 1971 and soon afterwards published in magazines (Oct. 1971 – Jan. 1972).

As it turned out, the purpose of the 1972 English translation of HUI changed over time. Borges' initial enthusiasm for rewriting the book in English was succeeded – when he and di Giovanni finally got down to business – by Borges' mere attempt to tone down the baroque style. This brief collaboration was suddenly interrupted, after which di Giovanni stuck to fulfilling the contract with his publisher. He might have then developed a style apparently free from the restrictions that he used to abide by in his joint translations with the author. This great freedom could have implied that, while sticking to his usual objective – submitting Borges' prose to a more understandable and fluent style –, di Giovanni's HUI rendition not only introduced substantial syntactic changes but also incurred interpretation errors. Future research may extend our present contrastive analysis by taking into account broader linguistic aspects and cultural influences underlying di Giovanni's approach to translating HUI.

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ENDNOTES

1 These publications in magazines came on top of three translations previously done, which also integrate *A Universal History of Infamy*. One of these three translations is that of "Hombre de la esquina rosada" ("Streetcorner Man"). The other two special cases of *A Universal History of Infamy* are the translations of the free-verse poem "El enemigo generoso" ("The Generous Enemy") and of the short prose "Del rigor en la ciencia" ("Of Exactitude in Science").

2 See Sánchez (2022), and the studies cited therein.

3 In time, comprehensive and balanced perspectives may build on ongoing more partial studies.

4 The connection with translation studies is also acknowledged by other analysts who have examined the translations of Borges' short stories. See Alvstad (2019) and Sánchez (2023), and the studies cited therein.

5 Willson (2004) investigated this problem in the case of Borges as a translator, which is the inverse of the one studied here (i.e., Borges being translated) (ch. 3).

6 Recent citations include Baer and Woods (2022), Castro Rodea (2022), Chita and Stavrou (2020), and Cleary (2021).

7 His harshest criticisms (p. 754) include various translations (from Spanish into English) of the word "cosmorama", as well as those of "Congreso Eremítico" ("Congress of Hermits") (translated as "Hermetical Congress") and "vendedores de biblias" ("Bible sellers") (translated as "women selling Bibles"). Regarding other, less clear-cut translation decisions, MacAdam may anyway use some strong judgements (p. 753) about the versions in question, such as "does not sound right" and "it is not clear whether", as well as implying that the adjective "boundless" of one translation is too ambiguous to capture the specific time dimension of the example's "interminable" (in Spanish).

8 "Hombre" was included in HUI as a separate section until 1974 when it was equated to the other short stories in the book, as part of *Obras Completas (Complete Works).* Before being published in HUI in 1935, "Hombre" had come out in a magazine in 1933, under a pseudonym, as "Hombres de las orillas" ("Men of the Outskirts").

9 Merwin's translation had been done for Borges (1972); when publishing HUI's translation that same year di Giovanni implied that Merwin's translation might have dated from years earlier, since Borges (1972)'s copyright was attributed to "1968, 1972." "Of Exactitude" had appeared in *Antioch Review* (Autumn, 1970 - Winter, 1971), as a joint work between di Giovanni and Borges.

10 Hereinafter, any citation indicated by dates in the day/month/year format corresponds to an entry in the diary of Bioy Casares (2006).

11 Di Giovanni's creative chronology is also noticeable in his biographical details, as reported in the edition of his HUI translation: although the break-up with Borges occurred in mid-1971, we there read: "He [di Giovanni] worked with Borges in Buenos Aires from 1968 to 1972." (our clarification).

12 This is what many entries in Bioy Casares (2006) record, for example this relatively early statement by Borges: "I don't think he [di Giovanni] has that great sense of style that he boasts about all the time. Generally those who have a great sense of style give some proof of having it." (1/5/1969; our clarification). Unless otherwise stated, the translations into English given in this article are ours.

13 The short prose not included in English is "A Double for Muhammed."

14 In each case, we accompany the English version (taken from Borges, 1975) with our literal translation of the original, followed by the original itself in curly brackets. The point of reference is always the definitive edition in Spanish (Borges, 1974); although di Giovanni translated a previous edition of HUI (the one from 1954), in the cases that we quote here this version coincides with the one from 1974.

15 The comparison is between Bill and a very poisonous snake that seems harmless.

16 The Spanish epithet "lateral" ("side") had already outraged di Giovanni in c.1968, when he was translating "Poema conjetural" ("Conjectural Poem") (1943, *El otro, el mismo (The Other, the Same*)), one of Borges' most celebrated poems. In the "Introduction" to Borges (1972, xxiii), di Giovanni claimed to have asked the author what he meant by "lateral"; Borges answered by describing the hero's situation in "Conjectural Poem"; di Giovanni ended up opting for a paraphrase of the original. He also avoided making a literal translation each of the three times the epithet "lateral" appears in *Elogio de la sombra.* We believe that one reason why Borges liked "lateral" is its polysemy: it means "on one side" (or "on both sides"), but also "secondary."

17 Only in "El espejo de tinta" ("The Mirror of Ink") are di Giovanni's interventions less noticeable, which could suggest a participation of Borges.

18 The translation of "Prólogo a la primera edición" ("Preface to the first edition") is mostly literal, but the innovations that di Giovanni introduced at the end of this short piece make us doubt that Borges collaborated on its translation.

[19] When published in a magazine, the title of the translation was "Old New York's Classic Yegg"; the title was changed to a faithful version ("Monk Eastman, Purveyor of Iniquities") for its book appearance.

[20] The irony is evident in another statement by Borges (1982): "My translators are so good that they always improve my text. . . . It's the truth! There is even one of my translators, Norman Thomas Di Giovanni, who told me: 'My translations are worth much more than your texts!' He was right, obviously. He said so himself, right?" (p. 6).

[21] The translations of "Streetcorner Man" and of the short prose "Of Exactitude in Science" belonged to a previous collaboration.