
Efrain Kristal. *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002, 213 pp.

The opening paragraph of *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* recounts Borges's introduction as a guest lecturer at a 1953 conference on the Kabbalah. Although Borges is a world renowned

novelist, essayist, poet and short story writer, the Argentinean literary genius chose to be introduced as a translator at that time, demonstrating just how highly Borges regarded his translations. While Borges was very much aware of the importance of translation throughout his career, critics have only recently begun to study his work as a translator. *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* is the result of six years of research on Borges as a translator and the role that translation has played in his creative work.

In his introduction, Kristal points out that his attempt to identify, understand and appreciate translation's role in Borges's work is an approach very different from that with which Borges produced his work. Kristal believes that Borges viewed authors as a pretext for their literary work and translation as a way of illuminating a work's value, which was inherently limited by the original author's own capabilities. Because Borges approaches translation with the mindset that a piece of literature is always superior to the author itself, and, consequently, that a translation can often outshine the original, Kristal examines translation as a key to under-

standing Borges's work. If Borges views translation as the path to the work, Kristal considers translation a path to the author.

Kristal presents his findings in three chapters, each of which focuses on a distinct aspect of Borges's work: 1) his ideas about translation, 2) his work as a translator and 3) his use of translation in his own, original works. Kristal quotes Borges, who offers that, "no problem is as substantial to literature and its modest mystery as the one posed by translation." Kristal adds that, "no activity, other than reading, has been more central to his [Borges's] creative process than translation."

While the general consensus in literary circles is that Borges's translations are true to the original, Kristal proposes that many of his translations are not loyal to the original; they surpass the original work through Borges's creative approach to translation.

Kristal elaborates on this idea in chapter one, "Borges on Translation," explaining, that although Borges never did write a "fully elaborated treatise on translation," he did develop a clear set of ideas regarding translation, which includes translatability, the over-

whelming importance of “the impersonal and collective factors of the literary experience,” and the view that the translator is another mind in the creative process, working to achieve the full potential of a piece of literature. In understanding these principles which guided Borges’s translation, the reader can reach a better understanding of Borges’s assertion that a translation does not have to be subordinate to the original.

In chapter two, “Borges as Translator,” Kristal demonstrates how Borges worked as a translator; by minimizing parts of the work he viewed as repetitive or trivial, focusing the reader on what he considered the most appealing parts of the work, taking liberty in changing or adding a component of the work, and liberally altering the style of a work. In short, Kristal suggests that Borges’s translations are reflections of the original, with distinct, “Borgesian touches.”

The third chapter, “Translation in the Creative Process,” sheds light on the role of translation in Borges’s creative work. Through an examination of “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”, “The Immortal”, “Death and the Compass”, “Emma Zunz”, “The Garden of

Forking Paths”, “The Circular Ruins”, “The Writing of God” and “The Lottery in Babylon”, Kristal illuminates how translation serves as a central component of Borges’s work: the choice of translators as characters, the use of translations or imagined translations to present a work and the direct links between some of Borges’s creative work and literature that he had translated previously. Kristal provides evidence of the essential role of translation in Borges’s creative process, claiming, “His translations transform his originals into drafts that precede them; his own literary works transform his readings into a repertoire of possibilities in which his own translations, and his views about translations, play a decisive role.”

Invisible Work: Borges and Translation attempts to provide, not only an understanding of Borges as a translator, but also as an author of creative works within the context of translation. While at first glance the conclusion, afterward, endnotes and bibliography, composing 70 pages of the text, may make reading the book seem like a daunting task, Kristal’s work is both enlightening and accessible. Relevant to both students

of translation and to Borges's loyal readers wishing to gain a deeper understanding of the author's works, *Invisible Work: Borges*

and Translation is a welcome contribution.

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