

**A Happy Transmigration?: Silvina Ocampo translates Emily Dickinson**

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*The Argentinian poet Silvina Ocampo's translation of Emily Dickinson has gone through three editions, and was praised by Jorge Luis Borges as 'a sort of happy transmigration'. Borges implies that the versions are respectful, literal, and that the translation is an authentic expression of Dickinson's poetic diction. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the accuracy of Borges' description and to examine the thorny questions of 'faithfulness' and 'literalness' in order to find out whether Ocampo's apparent mistranslations might be part of a deforming tendency.*

*Las traducciones que hizo la poeta argentina Silvina Ocampo de Emily Dickinson se han reeditado tres veces, y Jorge Luis Borges las ha calificado de 'una suerte de venturosa transmigración'. Borges implica que las versiones de Ocampo son respetuosas, literales, y que las traducciones expresan auténticamente la voz poética de Dickinson. El propósito de esta ponencia es evaluar la certeza de la descripción de Borges, y examinar las cuestiones espinosas de la 'fidelidad' y la 'literalidad', para investigar si, quizás, lo que parece mal traducido por Ocampo podría ser parte de una tendencia deformadora generalizada.*

**Key words:** Silvina Ocampo – Emily Dickinson – Jorge Luis Borges – translation – faithfulness - literalness - poetry - transmigration

**Palabras clave:** Silvina Ocampo – Emily Dickinson – Jorge Luis Borges – traducción – fidelidad – literalidad – poesía – transmigración

Silvina Ocampo translates Emily Dickinson is one among many translators into Spanish of the New England poet Emily Dickinson's poetry.<sup>1</sup> Her volume *Poemas de Emily Dickinson*, first published in 1985 in time for the centenary of Dickinson's death and containing a selection of nearly 600 poems, has gone through three editions.<sup>2</sup> This book appeared in Spain in the prestigious series *Marginales*, whose title implicitly engages with the politics of canon-formation, a question which concerns scholars of both Ocampo and Dickinson in their respective spheres, since both women were notorious for their resistance to self-promotion (though Dickinson's self-confinement was more severe).

I shall begin by briefly putting this substantial translation project of Ocampo into context. Ocampo had been working on these translations for several years prior to their publication, and as far as I know the commission (using Vermeer's term) to translate Dickinson was her own.<sup>3</sup> Ocampo (1903-1993) maintained throughout her life a significant relationship with poetry in the English language, through her various activities as reader, translator and writer. Although Silvina Ocampo was not as pro-active in promoting pan-American and transatlantic cultural exchange as her elder sister Victoria, who founded the influential literary and cultural magazine, *Sur*, nevertheless – partly thanks to her family's governesses - she read and spoke English and French before Spanish,<sup>4</sup> and translated poetry (and some short prose) from both these languages. She contributed translations to various special issues of *Sur*, and was actively involved in the production of the 1949 anthology *Poetas líricos ingleses*, 'inglés' here being interpreted broadly as 'English-language' and including such poets as Walt Whitman, to whose poetry Ocampo's own has been compared.<sup>5</sup> Her main contribution to the *Poetas líricos ingleses* was in the form of a long introductory survey essay, which she concludes with a vision of intertextual poetic links and the importance of translation, particularly that carried out by poets, from which we can reasonably deduce that she felt that the translation of poetry in particular was a task for poets.

los versos [...] forman universos con sus diálogos [...]  
Un parentesco los une, una voluntad divina va [...]  
asociándolos a otras vidas futuras. [...] Nunca se harán  
bastantes traducciones (traducciones llevadas a cabo por  
poetas), ni se tratará bastante de hacer pasar de un idioma  
a otro la voz inmortal e inspiradora de los poetas.<sup>6</sup>

Dickinson's poetic universe or 'mental picture' (to use Ortega's term) can be seen to be associated with a future life in the work of Ocampo.<sup>7</sup> We can sense the similarities, since many of the Dickinson poems Ocampo chooses to translate resonate with themes from her own poetry and prose. A few examples of this affinity: Dickinson's poem 167, whose second verse depicts "homesick feet / Upon a foreign shore — / Haunted by native lands, the while — / And blue — beloved air!" touches a chord with Ocampo's perversely homesick poem, 'El balcón'.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Dickinson's poem 33 "If recollecting were forgetting, / Then I remember not" (EDJ, 21) calls to mind many of Ocampo's poems which play with the conceits of memory and oblivion; Ocampo's own 'Alquimia traslúcida' (PC II, 32) echoes the kind of poetic voice so frequent in Dickinson which imagines itself into objects, plants, birds or insects in nature. Ocampo also indulges, in the 'Poemas breves' collected posthumously by Noemí Ulla, in the kind of aphoristic philosophical reflections beloved of Dickinson; compare for instance Ocampo's 'Perpetuidad': "¡Qué hermafrodita es el remordimiento!" (PC II, 272) with Dickinson's Poem 21: "We lose — because we win — / Gamblers — recollecting which / Toss their dice again!" (EDJ, 15) or various of Ocampo's other epigrammatic poems, many of which are reminiscent of Dickinson:

'Sacrificios Puros'

Le basta a la mentira, la mentira. / ¡Pero cuántas mentiras  
la verdad necesita / para que la comprendan! (PC II,  
270)

'Estado de gracia'

Con qué bondad nos escuchaba dios / cuando aún no  
sabíamos hablar. (PC II, 275)

'Apremio'

Nuestra impaciencia por morir proviene / de tener que  
morir sin remisión. (PC II, 277)

Gender ambiguities are also a link between the universes of the two writers; critics have probed Dickinson's passionate letters to her sister-in-law, Susan Dickinson,<sup>9</sup> and likewise have scrutinized Ocampo's relationship with the Argentine poet, Alejandra Pizarnik.<sup>10</sup>

Returning now to Ocampo's insistence in the earlier quotation on the importance of *poets* translating other poets, this would seem to suggest that Ocampo would prioritize the overall *poetic* impact of the new version in her approach to translation. This, however, appears not to be the case in her versions of Dickinson, which are described in somewhat ambiguous terms by Jorge Luis Borges in his prologue. The dust jacket of the book labels him as 'portavoz de esta "comuni3n"' [between Dickinson and Ocampo]; as spokesperson he implicitly defines Ocampo's skopos as one of respect and faithfulness, but with something of a coded criticism stemming from his own views on translation:

He sospechado que el concepto de versi3n literal [...] procede de los fieles que no se atrevían a cambiar una palabra dictada por el Espíritu. Emily Dickinson parece haber inspirado a Silvina Ocampo un respeto análogo. Casi siempre, en este volumen, tenemos las palabras originales en el mismo orden.

No es cotidiano el hecho de un poeta traducido por otro poeta. Silvina Ocampo es, fuera de duda, la máxima poeta argentina; la cadencia, la entonaci3n, la pudorosa complejidad de Emily Dickinson aguardan al lector de estas páginas, en una suerte de venturosa transmigraci3n.<sup>11</sup>

Borges' delicately skeptical handling of the 'concept' of a literal version implies criticism in its use of the phrase 'no se atrevían'; we infer that Borges would be more bold. Saying that Ocampo's translations give us 'las palabras originales en el mismo orden' is obviously provocative, since many words do not have a direct equivalent from English into Spanish, or those that appear cognate have a set of connotations and associations which do not exactly overlap or coincide. However, Borges is suggesting a certain kind of 'syntactical' fidelity, which, in general, Ocampo does observe. At this point, a consideration of Borges' own ideas on translation is apt, excellently summarized by Efraín Kristal:

For Borges, a literal translation attempts to maintain all the details of the original, but changes the emphasis (understood as meanings, connotations, associations, and effects of the work). A "recreation," on the other hand, omits many details to conserve the emphasis of the work,

and it may add interpolations. Since a “copy” maintains both the details and the emphasis that matter in a discussion of a work, most translations, especially prose translations, include some measure of “copying”. A faithful translation, for Borges, retains the meanings and effects of the work, whereas an unfaithful translation changes them. A literal translation that changes the emphasis of the work is therefore unfaithful.<sup>12</sup>

Taking all these subtle distinctions into account we should reassess Borges’ description of Ocampo’s achievement. By drawing an analogy between her translation praxis and ‘los fieles’, Borges deliberately evokes the notorious translation minefield of ‘faithfulness’ or ‘fidelity’ to the original, and raises the question in our minds of whether or not Ocampo’s versions are faithful. Saying that ‘la cadencia, la entonación, la pudorosa complejidad de Emily Dickinson aguardan al lector de estas páginas’ implies a kind of spiritual ‘recreation’ which aims primarily at the poetic effect, including aspects of sound and rhythm, but this would also imply changing details in order to prioritize and achieve that effect. Therefore, the ‘faithful’ who dare not change a word of Scripture, may make – in Borges’ terms – unfaithful translators. His final phrase ‘venturosa transmigración’ suggests that Ocampo’s versions give a sense of Dickinson’s soul having passed into Ocampo’s body. What is at stake here is what exactly constitutes this soul. It is true that Ocampo often gives a translation that is close to the original in that it follows Dickinson word for word, but that does not guarantee a ‘faithful’ reproduction of the way that Dickinson’s English invites us to make sense of her poems; not only because word-for-word versions can have perverse effects with the inevitable shifts in register, connotation and often number of syllables that this entails, but also because there are many other ‘semiotic codes’ (see note 13) of Dickinson’s for which Ocampo shows less respect. We therefore cannot easily reconcile all aspects of Borges’ ambiguous description. By examining various phrases from Dickinson’s poems alongside Ocampo’s versions of them, I aim to demonstrate that not only did those translations which are (in Borges’ terms) analogous to a version by ‘los fieles’ lead Ocampo into distortions in her renderings of Dickinson, but also that Ocampo has – to use Berman’s terms – certain ‘deforming tendencies’, arising from her unfaithfulness to these other semiotic aspects of the poetry such as connotations and typography, which belie or at least complicate Borges’ notion of the ‘venturosa transmigración’.

Most visually apparent of these deforming tendencies is her cavalier attitude towards ‘semiotic codes’ such as Dickinson’s trademark capitalization of letters and use of the dash, both commented on by Lisa Rose Bradford in her study of several Spanish versions of Poem 712, ‘Because I could not stop for Death’.<sup>13</sup> Ocampo is not alone in this amongst translators – see for example the French translations by Guy Jean Forgue, which are also fairly free with the punctuation.<sup>14</sup> This omission of some punctuation can have quite marked consequences, for instance in Poem 268, where ‘Me, change! Me, alter!’ (*EDJ*, 122) – in which the comma inserts a note of questioning and disbelief – becomes ‘¡Yo cambio! ¡Yo altero!’ (*Poemas*, 61), which sounds like a triumphant, almost defiant assertion. In Poem 62 there is also serious disregard for multiple semiotic messages given through punctuation and typography – compare the two versions below:

May *this* “dishonor” be? (*EDJ*, 32)<sup>15</sup>  
 ¿Puede esto ser deshonor? (*Poemas*, 27)

In the English, the italics place a strong emphasis on ‘this’ (which the reader struggles to identify – is it the poet’s present circumstance or something more/less tangible?) as distinct from ‘others’. Putting ‘dishonor’ in speech marks highlights its status as a quotation (from the first line of the poem, which in turn quotes the Bible, ‘sown in dishonor’) but also indicates a certain distancing and skepticism on the part of the poetic voice, which is the dominant mood of the poem. Neither of these typographical or punctuation details are present in Ocampo’s version; such flattening or distortion of the ambiguous attitude towards religion found in Dickinson is a recurrent feature of Ocampo’s versions, and is strikingly at odds with her ‘faithfulness’ to the syntax.

In terms of omitting capital letters (which Ocampo does almost universally), various vital effects of heightened allegorical, portentous or religious tone are lost. For example, in Poem 7, Dickinson capitalizes almost every noun: Crocus, Vassal, Hallelujah, Bargemen, Diver’s, Sea, Pinions, Seraph’s, Canvas, Immortality, Village, Angels, Cantons, Classics and Dark, but does *not* capitalize either ‘resurrection’ or ‘faith’, which seem therefore deliberately highlighted by the absence of capital letter. In her translation, Ocampo capitalizes only one word, ‘Serafin’, which appears arbitrary in the context. Again, this is an aspect in which Ocampo

could unproblematically be ‘faithful’, therefore not do so suggests either carelessness or a deforming tendency.

In the following example from Poem 18, which is a good example of Ocampo giving us ‘las palabras originales en el mismo orden’, the purely poetic effect of alliteration, heightened by capitals, is inevitably lost in translation, since the ‘equivalent’ Spanish words do not alliterate, although they do incidentally have a pleasing assonance and rhythmic patterning. However, retaining the capitals in Spanish would at least have retained in a visual typographical dimension Dickinson’s subversive gesture towards an alternative Trinitarian formula to the standard patriarchal Father, Son and Holy Ghost:

Summer — Sister — Seraph!  
[...]  
In the name of the Bee —  
And of the Butterfly —  
And of the Breeze — Amen! (*EDJ*, 14)

¡verano — hermana — serafín  
[...]  
En el nombre de la abeja —  
y de la mariposa —  
y de la brisa — ¡amén! (*Poemas*, 19)

Most linguistically striking of her deforming tendencies are Ocampo’s many apparent mis-translations. For example, Poem 23, ‘When the woods were painted’ (*EDJ*, 16), referring to autumn colours, is rendered as ‘cuando se pintaron las maderas’ (*Poemas*, 20) giving us a carpentry or DIY semantic field, rather than nature; Ocampo’s version of Poem 458, ‘Like Eyes that looked on Wastes — ’ (*EDJ*, 220), where wastes refers to a wilderness (as confirmed by line 4), rather than transporting us imaginatively to the *pampas* or the *llanos* gains a more urban Latin American flavour through the unfortunate phrase ‘Como ojos que miran las basuras — ’ (*Poemas*, 118), conjuring up heaps of trash.

Other apparent mistranslations seem due to false friends, though make some sense, for example Poem 249, ‘Might I but moor — Tonight — / In Thee!’ (*EDJ*, 114) becomes ‘¡Ah! ¡si pudiera morar — esta noche

— en ti!’ (*Poemas*, 55) where ‘morar’ though looking cognate means to stay or dwell and loses the nautical allusion entirely, which would require the verb ‘amarrar’ in Spanish. The verb ‘morar’ gives the Spanish version a quasi-mystical connotation, perhaps calling to mind for Spanish readers such poems as Santa Teresa de Jesús’ ‘Castillo interior o las moradas’.<sup>16</sup> Poem 280 contains the line ‘And then a Plank in Reason broke’ (*EDJ*, 129), continuing a metaphor of wooden boards, which Ocampo has apparently read as ‘blank’, providing us with ‘y luego un vacío en la razón, se quebró’ (*Poemas*, 67), which becomes immediately more philosophical and less easily visualized. In Borges’ terms, both such translations might be regarded as unfaithful yet at the same time in some way successful (see Kristal, p. 33), particularly since the first example does have something of Dickinson’s ‘soul’ by applying words associated with divine love to a human relationship (see later discussion of poem 405).

Less obvious, and more ambiguous in its intentionality is Ocampo’s ‘destruction of underlying networks of signification’, to use Berman’s category, such as the network which relates to issues of religious faith and belief, an area of significance of paramount importance in Dickinson’s universe.<sup>17</sup> Her tendency appears to be towards replacing this network with words associated with chance or fate, or simply grounded in more tangible experience. The question is, was she simply a careless translator with an insufficiently sophisticated command of English, or are there patterns of meaning relating to overall philosophical and religious beliefs in Ocampo’s poetic universe which do not coincide with those of Dickinson and which therefore emerge reshaped in translation? Certain apparent careless mistranslations may in fact fit into the overall pattern of this deforming tendency as being dictated by a differing world view. Similarly, questions of gender and personal relationships, so complex and multi-layered in Dickinson (as explored by H. Jordan Landry and Sylvia Henneberg<sup>18</sup>) are often blurred or altered by Ocampo in a way which is characteristic of the deliberate gender ambiguity of much of her own poetry and prose.

In Dickinson, there are many key words which recur in a variety of different poems, and which therefore make intertextual links between the poems. Since there is often very little context in Dickinson’s poems to assist the translator as reader in initial interpretations of the poems (as

Lynn Shakinovsky has observed)<sup>19</sup>, these key words take on greater importance as signifiers in their own right. Ocampo as a translator appears not to make these connections, despite her earlier quoted remark about ‘poems [...] creat[ing] universes with their dialogues’, which would suggest a holistic approach within and beyond an individual poet’s work. Ocampo therefore destroys an element of unity in the Dickinson oeuvre by translating these key words in different ways. For example, ‘Robin’; Ocampo variously translates this as ‘pájaro’ (poem 5) or ‘tordo’ (poems 23, 128 and 188) but never as ‘petirrojo’, and never capitalizes the word, thus removing both the inter-poem links and the possible productive ambiguity of this looking like a proper name as well as a bird.<sup>20</sup>

Moving from the level of individual words to that of the phrase, one which Dickinson repeats in two different poems is ‘The Debauchee of Dews’ in Poem 128 (*EDJ*, 60), which recurs as ‘Debauchee of Dew’ in Poem 214 (*EDJ*, 99). A careful translator who wished to preserve the link this distinctive and memorable phrase naturally creates between the two poems in the mind of the attentive reader would consider, at least, translating them in the same way (though observing the plural/singular change). Ocampo, however, translates it in Poem 128 as ‘disoluta del rocío’ (*Poemas*, 38) and in Poem 214 as ‘pervertida de rocío’ (*Poemas*, 49), giving the second a different, more sexual charge, and ignoring the plural, ‘dews’.

To illustrate some of the more ambiguous deforming tendencies in the Ocampo versions which ‘destroy underlying networks of signification’, I will give a few concrete examples; firstly regarding the blurring of gender in Poem 46, and secondly regarding the distortion of philosophical, religious or emotional signification from Poems 18, 254, 269, 322 and 405.

Poem 46 (*EDJ*, 26; *Poemas*, 23-24) centres around the pledging of an oath by the poet, but rather than swearing on the Bible, the poet pledges by insects and flowers (recalling Poem 18 discussed earlier). However, all the flowers named by the poet also have a feminine charge, some also doubling as girls’ names in English, a fact which is heightened by Dickinson’s use of capital letters: ‘I bring my Rose’, ‘By Daisy called from hillside’, ‘Blossom and I’. The feminine charge is reinforced in the following and penultimate line, ‘*Her* oath, and mine’. Ocampo’s version

omits the capitals on 'rosa' and 'margarita' (despite the fact that both of these could also double as girls' names in Spanish), pluralizes daisy to 'por las margaritas de la montaña' making the pledge less intense and personal, and renders 'Blossom and I' as 'FloreCIMIENTO y yo', where the Spanish word is much more metaphorical than literal, reserved for expressions like 'el florecimiento de la cultura renacentista'. It is also a masculine word, whereas choosing 'flor' (a girl's name in Spanish) would have kept the feminine charge of the original. And of course, 'her oath' becomes 'su promesa' in Spanish, non gender-specific and meaning either his or her, only avoidable by a phrase such as 'de ella' which Ocampo has not chosen to use. In this way, the underlying feminine (and possibly lesbian) charge of the poet's link to nature is lost.

In terms of altering the philosophical, religious or emotional charge behind certain of the poems, it is worth considering again Poem 18 (*EDJ*, 14; *Poemas*, 19). Despite offering, as I have mentioned, an alternative Trinity in this poem, nevertheless there is an underlying sense of trust in a higher power in the phrase 'We trust that she was willing — / We ask that we may be', referring to a person at the moment of death. Ocampo alters and undermines the sense of this entirely, giving us 'creíamos que ella estaría de acuerdo — / preguntamos si lo estaba', that is, 'we believed or thought that she would be willing — / we ask whether she was'. The second phrase therefore serves to cast doubt on the first, rather than binding the poet and congregation to the recently dead person in a spirit of trust.

Similarly in her translation of Poem 254 (*EDJ*, 116; *Poemas*, 56), Ocampo makes two significant changes to the sense which render her version less hopeful than Dickinson's. Firstly, where Dickinson declares that ' "Hope" is the thing with feathers', which – by using the definite article – gives hope a specificity and a tangible form and presence, Ocampo omits the definite article, substituting instead the vague 'algo', something: ' "Esperanza" es algo con plumas', which makes hope seem less substantial and less immediately graspable. In the second stanza of this same poem, Dickinson further bolsters hope by saying that 'sore must be the storm — / That could abash the little Bird / That kept so many warm', in other words, it would have to be a really terrible storm to dash all hope. Ocampo, by her alteration of tenses from what should logically be conditional and/or imperfect subjunctive in Spanish, makes

it sound as though the storm succeeded. Her translation is rather nonsensical, however, since she translates *sore* in its literal sense as *wounded*, ‘*herida*’, and translates ‘*so many*’ as ‘*so much*’, with the effect of removing the community of people with hope and closing the bird in on itself for warmth in a pathetic kind of way: ‘*y herida tiene que estar la tormenta — / que pudo abatir al pajarito / que reservó tanto calor*’.

The translation of Poem 269 gives a slant which again is more in keeping with Ocampo’s own poetic aesthetic, which is one of not trying to limit pain or grief, but simply to probe its intensity and find images in which to do so. Whereas Dickinson’s original poem urges us to ‘*Limit — how deep a bleeding go!*’ (*EDJ*, 123), Ocampo’s version simply measures – but does not attempt to staunch – the loss of blood: ‘*¡Mide el fluir de la sangre!*’ (*Poemas*, 61). A similar intensification of, and dwelling on, pain comes in Poem 322, which in Dickinson ends:

To that new Marriage,  
Justified — through Calvaries of Love — (*EDJ*, 153)

Ocampo makes the Calvaries singular, Calvary, thereby defining the whole quality of love as a painful trial, rather than a series of smaller instances of suffering: *para esa boda nueva, vindicada — a través del calvario del amor — (Poemas, 79).*

The gloomier aspect this reveals on interpersonal relationships becomes further complicated in Ocampo’s version of Poem 405. In the original, this poem intertwines love for another person with the vocabulary of divine love, referring to ‘*the Sacrament — of Him —*’ and to the possibility that Hope (of his arrival) might ‘*blaspheme the place — / Ordained to Suffering*’ (*EDJ*, 193). Ocampo maintains the religious associations in ‘*sacramento — de él*’ (*Poemas*, 102) but instead of hope blaspheming, hope might ‘*violar el lugar*’, *violar* being a verb associated not only with violating a sacred place, but also – and more commonly – with sexual violence. Admittedly Dickinson’s transitive use of the verb *blaspheme* is idiosyncratic, and ‘*blasfemar*’ is usually intransitive in Spanish, but could not a case be made for carrying over the idiosyncratic verbal trope into Spanish, rather than bringing in the negative sexual connotations of ‘*violate*’, which makes the religious aspect of the dynamics

of desire spelt out by Dickinson less prominent? Where Dickinson's poem uses religious language to idolize the absent desired one, the jarring note of the verb 'violar' in Ocampo's version suggests that the person's arrival would not be upsetting the sacred space of Loneliness but rather intruding unwantedly upon the speaker herself. The final stanza changes from a religious network of signification to a geographical one, referring to the desired meeting with the loved one as 'Land in Sight' and 'My Blue Peninsula'.

It might be easier  
To fail — with Land in sight  
Than gain — My Blue Peninsula  
To Perish — of Delight

Ocampo, again, maintains the semantic field, but rather than simply gaining, or reaching, this Peninsula, Ocampo reads the verb 'gain' in the sense of acquiring territory. She therefore brings a colonial feel to the translation with the verb *conquistar*: '*conquistar — mi azul península*' (*Poemas*, 102) as if she were engaged in a struggle for territory with the loved one. This again seems to show Ocampo bringing – subconsciously or otherwise – the kind of relational dynamics which recur in her own poetry to her translation of Dickinson, twisting or distorting Dickinson's network of religious, sentimental and natural vocabulary and its carefully loaded capitals and presenting the Spanish reader with a soul which has neither the rhythm, intonation nor modest complexity of the original, but is rougher and less trusting.

Returning then to Borges' careful wording in describing Ocampo's translatorly practice as analogous to 'los fieles': his reference to her word-for-word adherence to Dickinson's syntax should perhaps, then, be read as somewhat skeptical – skeptical not only about the very concept of a 'versión literal' but also about the merits of being literal on the level of individual words, and thereby sacrificing some of the effects of the original. We can see Borges' skepticism towards 'faithfulness' in general if we look at another such prologue that Borges wrote for Ocampo in a book published only one year earlier than these Dickinson translations, namely *Breve santoral*, a collaborative work of poetry and visual art on twelve Saints, produced by Ocampo and Norah Borges, Jorge Luis' sister. In his prologue, he relativizes the Saints, making them as real or fantastic

as Roman Gods, and says that rather than having faith, the artist need only accept them in his or her imagination and play with them.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, in this 'communion' between the 'soul' of Dickinson and Ocampo, Borges – reading between the lines – perhaps sees Ocampo's 'faithfulness' as something equally mythical. With his excellent command of English, he would no doubt see that these 'literal' versions (in the syntactical sense alone) were sometimes taking Ocampo off in quite different directions from the original as regards the other necessary elements of poetry such as rhythm and sounds, and overall effect. Perhaps the way to interpret Borges' provocative prologue is therefore to read it as hinting that the transmigration of Dickinson's soul into Ocampo has been accomplished, but that in a new 'body', the soul acquires different characteristics. This transmigration is inevitably accompanied by a transmutation, a shift of emphasis and effect in the nature of 'faith' and of other key networks of signification within the poetry. The adjective 'venturosa' may have to be interpreted as describing a serendipitously felicitous (and occasionally infelicitous) - but not unchanged - expression of Dickinson's soul.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Other versions of her poetry in Spanish are: Emily Dickinson *Poemas* (Madrid: Visor, 1979), selection and translation by María Manent; Emily Dickinson, *Poemas* (Barcelona: Bosch, 1980), introduction, verse translations and notes by Ricardo Jordana and María Dolores Macarulla; Emily Dickinson *Obra escogida* (Madrid: Torremozas, 1989), selection, translation and biographical note by Ernestina Champomoin and Juan José Domenchina; Emily Dickinson *Poemas* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1987; 1992; bilingual edition in 2000), edited and translated by Margarita Ardanaz; *Emily Dickinson: La soledad sonora* (Madrid; Buenos Aires: Cruz del Sur, 2001), selection, prologue and translations by Lorenzo Oliván; *Emily Dickinson: Algunos poemas* (Granada: La Veleta, 2001), selection and translation by Carlos Pujol, and *Emily Dickinson: Crónica de plata* (Madrid: Hiperión, 2002), selection and translation by Manuel Villar Raso. Thanks to Marta Dahlgren for information on recent translations.
- <sup>2</sup> Emily Dickinson *Poemas*, selected and translated by Silvina Ocampo, prologue by Jorge Luis Borges (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1985). Subsequent editions published in 1988 and 1997. Henceforth *Poemas*.
- <sup>3</sup> Hans J. Vermeer, 'Skopos and commission in translational action', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 221-32, p. 229. Translation by Andrew Chesterman.
- <sup>4</sup> Patricia Marco refers to Ocampo's 'multilingual imagination'. See [http://www.filo.uba.ar/contenidos/novedades/cont/listado/verano\\_extracurriculares#3](http://www.filo.uba.ar/contenidos/novedades/cont/listado/verano_extracurriculares#3). Consulted February 2004.
- <sup>5</sup> See Helena Percas, 'La original expresión poética de Silvina Ocampo', in *Revista Iberoamericana* 19:38 (1954) 283-98, pp. 283-4 and 286.
- <sup>6</sup> *Poetas líricos ingleses*, selected by Ricardo Baeza, with preliminary study by Silvina Ocampo (Buenos Aires: Jackson, 1949), pp.xliii-xliv.

- <sup>7</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, 'The Misery and the Splendor of Translation', translated by Elizabeth Gamble Miller, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, pp. 49-63.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1960), p. 79. All subsequent references to Dickinson's poems in English will be taken from this edition, henceforth *EDJ*. Silvina Ocampo, *Poesía completa* in 2 vols. (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2002 (vol.1) and 2003 (vol.2)), Vol. 1, p. 45. Subsequent references to Ocampo's poetry will give just a volume (*PC I* or *PC II*) and page number.
- <sup>9</sup> See Martha Ackmann, 'Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson's Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson', Review Essay on book of that title edited by Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith, *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 8.2 (1999), 111-13.
- <sup>10</sup> Alluded to by Marcelo Pichon Rivière in his suggestively titled article, 'La vida misteriosa de Silvina Ocampo', where he notes the existence of 'cartas de Alejandra [Pizarnik] a Silvina, que entretejen una historia amorosa.' He continues in voyeuristic tone: 'Lentamente, esa historia apasionante [...] abre las puertas de su recinto secreto.' In *Clarín*, Cultura y Nación section, Buenos Aires, 6 September 1998, pp.4-5, p.5.
- <sup>11</sup> Transmigration or metempsychosis is a concept also explored by Ocampo herself in some of her early short stories, such as 'El impostor': 'Pensé en la transmigración de las almas. Recordé algunas frases relacionadas con el dogma de la filosofía india: "El alma está en el cuerpo como el pájaro en la jaula". "El cuerpo hace largos viajes y cuando [...] perece lo abandona, como al casco de un barco, para buscar otro y gobernarlo como al anterior."' In *Cuentos completos I*, p.112.
- <sup>12</sup> Efraín Kristal, *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2002), pp. 32-33.
- <sup>13</sup> Lisa Rose Bradford, 'La visión de las versiones: un estudio de diferencias/resistencias en Emily Dickinson', in *CELEHIS: Revista del Centro de Letras Hispanoamericanas* 4:4-5 (1995) 117-32. Bradford highlights Dickinson's 'uso idiosincrático y, por ende,

de especial carga semántica de rayas y mayúsculas' (p.120), saying that Ocampo's version of poem 712 was criticised by Bradford's translation workshop for its 'falta de respeto hacia las marcas líricas y genéricas del poema' (p. 121). Bradford disagrees openly with Borges' statement about Dickinson's 'cadence' awaiting the reader in Ocampo's versions; she states that 'las incongruencias y la irregularidad rítmica borran lo "pudoroso" de la complejidad, y también alteran la cadencia sencilla característica de Dickinson' (p. 123). In her opinion, in order to render faithfully the poetry of Emily Dickinson into another language, 'El discurso semiótico de la poeta [...] debe traducirse con todos sus componentes – mayúsculas, rayas, y ritmos – para transplantar el valor prerreferencial [Bradford uses this in a Kristevan sense] que contiene en el nuevo idioma' (*op. cit.*, p.126).

<sup>14</sup> Emily Dickinson, *Poèmes* (bilingual edition), French version by Guy Jean Forgue (Paris: Aubier, 1970).

<sup>15</sup> The poem references 1 Corinthians 15, verses 42-44 on the resurrection of the dead.

<sup>16</sup> In *Místicos españoles*, ed. by Luis Santullano (Madrid: Instituto-Escuela junta para ampliación de estudios, 1934), pp. 96-100.

<sup>17</sup> Antoine Berman, 'Translation and the Trials of the Foreign', translated by Lawrence Venuti, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, pp. 284-97, p. 288. For one of many critical discussions of this network of signification in Dickinson's work, see Kim Hosman, 'Emily Dickinson's Poetics of Translation', in *The Emily Dickinson Journal* III.1 (1996) [consulted online, at <http://www.colorado.edu/EDIS/journal/>], which discusses Dickinson's manipulation of the vocabulary of Calvinism.

<sup>18</sup> H. Jordan Landry, 'Animal / Insectual / Lesbian Sex: Dickinson's Queer Version of the Birds and the Bees', in *The Emily Dickinson Journal* IX:2 (2000) 42-54 and Sylvia Henneberg, 'Neither Lesbian nor Straight: Multiple Eroticisms in Emily Dickinson's Love Poetry', in *The Emily Dickinson Journal* IV:2 (1995) [consulted online, see note above].

- <sup>19</sup> Lynn Shakinovsky, 'No Frame of Reference: The Absence of Context in Emily Dickinson's Poetry', in *The Emily Dickinson Journal* III:2 (1994) [consulted online, see note above]. Shakinovsky states that Dickinson's poetry is characterized by the 'absence of the provision of a frame of reference inside which to read the poem'.
- <sup>20</sup> Such punning but on another name, Sue – which would obviously present great difficulty for the translator – is discussed by David Sullivan in 'Suing Sue: Emily Dickinson addressing Susan Gilbert', in *The Emily Dickinson Journal* V:1 (1996) [consulted online, see note above].
- <sup>21</sup> 'Coleridge dejó escrito que la fe poética es una suspensión voluntaria, o complaciente, de la incredulidad; en lo que se refiere al artista, basta que su imaginación acepte un hecho, que puede ser histórico o fabuloso. Juega parejamente con los doce trabajos de Hércules y con los exorcismos que obró Jesús.' In *Breve Santoral* by Silvina Ocampo and Norah Borges (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de Arte Gaglianone, 1984), p. 5.

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