

## Pierre Menard, traductor del Quijote; or Echo's Echoes

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HOW DOES OUR UNDERSTANDING of Cervantes or of Borges, of authorship or translation, change if we engage in the critical fiction that Pierre Menard is translator of *Don Quixote* and not its author? What are the dangers and possibilities of imagining a translation into the same language, into seemingly identical words? Is not the work of Cervantes's *morisco aljamiado* ultimately this? What is lost and what is gained, not just in translation, but in a translation that unsettles the original, that disrupts the very notion of translation? I begin with this critical fiction—of a “Pierre Menard, traductor del Quijote”—as preface to a close reading of a short passage from the story that turns on these very questions: the segment where the narrator reads, cannot help but read, not just the three chapters of the *Don Quixote* authored by Pierre Menard, but also other parts he never attempted, as if they were Menard's work.<sup>1</sup>

On one hand, my initial proposition of Menard as translator is not so farfetched, or at least no more farfetched than the story's premise; especially given the way in which those two seemingly separate categories of authorship are already conflated in *Don Quixote* and, markedly so,

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in the very chapters Menard decides to translate: chapter 9, a portion of which Borges cites in both Cervantes's and Menard's versions and that narrates the discovery of the manuscript authored by Cide Hamete in the alcañá de Toledo and the contracting of the *morisco* translator; chapter 38, which continues "el curioso discurso que hizo don Quijote de las armas y las letras" and ends with the opening of the Captive's tale itself, an adventure in translation and conversion (1.38:445); and a portion of chapter 22, the galley slaves episode, which opens with a characterization of Cide Hamete Benengeli, presumably offered by the *morisco* translator, as an "autor arábigo y manchego" (1.22:235).

On the other, the possibility of translation into the same language is one that Borges himself allows for in "Las versiones homéricas":

Un parcial y precioso documento de las vicisitudes que sufre [un texto] queda en sus traducciones. ¿Qué son las muchas de la *Ilíada* de Chapman a Magnien sino diversas perspectivas de un hecho móvil, sino un largo sorteo experimental de omisiones y de énfasis? (*No hay esencial necesidad de cambiar de idioma, ese deliberado juego de la atención no es imposible dentro de una misma literatura.*) [...] El concepto de *texto definitivo* no corresponde sino a la religión o al cansancio (239, emphasis mine).

After suggesting that translations write the text along with its story, Borges mentions parenthetically, as if in passing, the idea of monolingual translation. The raffling or rifling ("sorteo") of omissions and emphases that translation enacts does not require a second language. Rather, it would seem, every text is already a translation, a version, a graft or draft of an inconceivable definitive version.

On another hand still, imagining Pierre Menard as translator of *Don Quixote* will require that, like Menard, we forget the story (Borges's in this case), and particularly those parts of the story that require Menard's forgetting of Cervantes's text. Every act of translation is, after all, an act of memory, a consummate rite of loyalty. And yet every act of translation also requires a betrayal of memory, an indifferent or a motivated forgetting, not unlike that on which Menard relies: "Mi

recuerdo general del Quijote,” Menard writes in a letter to the story’s narrator, “simplificado por el olvido y la indiferencia, puede muy bien equivaler a la imprecisa imagen anterior de un libro no escrito” (448). The crossing over that the enterprise of translation enacts hangs precariously between memory and forgetting: it must remember in order to forget and forget in order to remember.

If we accept, tentatively, the critical fiction of reading Pierre Menard’s *Don Quixote* as a translation, is it, in its seeming transparency, a faithful translation? Or is something else going on? Is *Don Quixote*—Cervantes’s or Menard’s, Borges’s, or Cide Hamete’s—translatable? How does Pierre Menard’s translation dismember and re-member that of Cervantes or of the *morisco aljamiado*?<sup>2</sup> How does it supplement it? How does it betray it? Is it an act of madness akin to Alonso Quijano’s to imagine a translation into the same language, into identical words? To begin to answer these questions, we might consider two models of translation that can be provisionally aligned with the acts of memory and forgetting I have been alluding to.<sup>3</sup> The first one is “literal” translation. This model of translation is inherently fundamentalist, attuned to the letter of the letter. It remembers words in their original language, and is, in fact, haunted or weighted by this memory. The literal model, often no more than a straw man, has more than its fair share of detractors. Horace and Cicero, for example, both warned against those translations that remain in the province of the mere word for word, *verbum pro verbo*. Cervantes’s contemporary Sebastián de Covarrubias, whose 1611 etymological dictionary, *El Tesoro de la lengua catellana o española*,

2 On Menard and Cervantes, see Roberto González Echevarría’s stunning reading in “The Novel after Cervantes: Borges and Carpentier” in which he suggests that Borges’s radical experiment in “Pierre Menard” is to imagine a literature without the nation and to situate that possibility in the nationalistic fervor of the 1930s (238). After noting the elusive quality of both Cide Hamete and the intrusive *morisco* translator, González Echevarría writes: “Borges latches on to this elusive quality of *Quijote*’s author. Is Menard like Cide Hamete or like the translator? If the Moor was indeed a liar, Menard had a penchant for writing the opposite of what he believed in, as the narrator of Borges’s story claims” (240).

3 The critical bibliography on translation theory is rich and fertile. On translation and translation theory, see especially Apter, Benjamin, Derrida (*Monolingualism*), Eco, Grossman, Pym, Schulte, and Biguenet, Steiner, and Venuti. On Borges and translation, see Kristal, Lezra, and Waisman.

might be thought of as a first “translation” of the Spanish language, ends his definition of translation precisely by citing Horace, untranslated. It is worth noting that Covarrubias translated Horace into “verso suelto Castellano,” in a text that remains lost.<sup>4</sup>

TRADUZIR, del verbo Latino *traduco*, *is*, por llevar de un lugar a otro alguna cosa, o encaminarla. [...] En lengua Latina tiene otras algunas sinificaciones Analógicas, pero en la Española sinifica el bolver la sentencia de una lengua en otra, como traduzir de Italiano, o de Francés algún libro en Castellano.

TRADUCCION, esta mesma obra: y tradutor, el autor della. Si esto no se haze con primor y prudencia, sabiendo igualmente las dos lenguas, y trasladando en algunas partes, no conforme a la letra, pero según el sentido sería lo que dixo un hombre sabio y crítico, que aquello era verter, tomándolo en sinificación de derramar y echar a perder. Esto advirtió bien Horacio en su *Arte poética* diciendo:

*Nec verbum verbo curabis reddere fidus / Interpres.* (972)

We might argue that a literal translation is threatened, destabilized by its excessive, Funes-like memory: it remembers the text it translates too well, myopically blind to the fact that consummate acts of loyalty are often riddled with betrayal, at least insofar as the transport or ferrying of meaning is concerned. It is at once fitting and ironic that Covarrubias’s definition of *traduzir* registers the fact that the translation of translation from “la lengua Latina” to “la Española” inscribes a disadequation, an excess swept under the rug of analogy, between those “otras sinificaciones” embedded in *traduco* and the sole “sinificación” that survives translation’s conversion to Spanish. It would seem that abandoning the word for word model has its costs in the coin of meaning. The punning quip offered by the “hombre sabio y crítico” about literal translation—“que aquello era verter”—inscribes a further irony.

4 In his entry for “HORACIO Flacco” in the *Suplemento al Tesoro*, Covarrubias writes: “Yo tengo trasladadas en verso suelto Castellano sus *Epístolas*, *Satyras*, y *Arte Poética*, que placiendo a dios, saldrá un día de estos a luz” (292).

In periphrastically translating the word play that turns on the double meaning of *verter* (as translate and spill), Covarrubias effectively undermines his critique of translation “conforme a la letra.” A literal translation would retain some trace at least—an echo—of the pun in a way that translation “según el sentido” cannot: in order to make sense, it must ultimately decide.

We can call our second model of translation “figural,” to conjure Erich Auerbach, or “según el sentido,” to stay with Covarrubias. It is attuned not to the old letter but to the new, to the promise of arrival in the new language, even if that new language is identical to the old. This model breaks a covenant of faith (or of a kind of faith) for the sake of a new covenant that is radically promissory. If literal translation looks to the past, figural translation looks to the future, to inhabiting a new home. It seeks not just to transport a work, a text, or a thought to another language (this, after all, is the task of all translators), but to naturalize it in its exile, with all the implications this word carries: an appeal to the natural, but also the adoption by or in that most un-natural construct, the state. If this figural mode of translation seems on one hand to break from memory—to require a forgetting of the letter—it is on the other hand plagued by the memory or the ghost of idiomatic meaning that threatens to carry it in a different—but arguably no less Funes-like—direction. Hear Covarrubias again in an earlier echo:

INTÉRPRETE, el que buelve las palabras y conceptos de una lengua en otra, en el qual se requiere fidelidad, prudencia, y sagacidad, y tener igual noticia de ambas lenguas, y lo que en ellas se dize por alusiones y términos metafóricos mirar lo que en estotra lengua le puede corresponder, como notan el descuydo del que bolvió *La Celestina*, que por la cláusula “tomó las calças de Villadiego,” dixo simplemente, “piglio le calce de Villa Iacome,” aviendo de atender al sentido que era “echó a huir,” sin embargo de que nos lo tenía advertido Horacio en su *Arte Poética*. (739-40)

As idiom, “tomó las calzas de Villadiego,” is untranslatable in the new language: it is so locally grounded—so intimate—as to resist ex-

port without undergoing a change of skin, or at least putting on a new set of breeches. The Italian translator who opted for the literal translation either failed altogether to understand this or understood it too well, choosing to retain the idiom, the calças, absent its (or their) contextual dirty laundry, the memory that gives it meaning. But the solution Covarrubias presents—“echó a huir”—which seems to correspond to our figural model, is a much impoverished version that in order to “atender al sentido” sacrifices both the intimate materiality of the calças, a materiality into which memory is inscribed, and all the baggage that comes with or from Villadiego.<sup>5</sup>

One question that the proposition of considering Menard a translator immediately raises is whether his “translation” corresponds to our literal model or to our figural one. Perhaps it is useful here to invoke another translator of *Don Quixote*, the one who first appears in chapter 9, when the second (or second-hand) author discovers the manuscript of the continuation of *Don Quixote* in the Toledo marketplace and hires *algún morisco aljamiado* to render the *carácteres arábigos* into Spanish. Casting our *morisco* against or alongside Menard provides us with two instances of translation that we might productively align with our two models (and the usefulness here will lie precisely in the failure of the alignment, the way they do not square). It would seem, on the surface, that a word-for-word translation such as we are attributing to Pierre Menard is the very literalization of literal: a version so “*al pie de la letra*” that it does not depart from it. “Referir una cosa letra por letra,” Covarrubias writes, “es contarla puntualmente, sin quitarle, ni ponerle nada: y lo mismo es al pie de la letra” (763). The fact that Menard’s and Cervantes’s respective *Don Quixotes* are “verbalmente idénticos” according to the narrator, could be cited as proof of its literality, of what would seem to be a non-deforming repetition.

The *morisco aljamiado* model, by contrast, appears to be a case of figural translation: rendered into a Spanish so flawless and idiomatic that it looks (or sounds) seamless, at least to the latter day narrator and bibliographer of Menard: “maneja con desenfado el español corriente

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5 On memory and materiality, see Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass’s superb *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*.

de su época.” (449). If this easy seamlessness can be read as a marker of our second mode of translation, however, so too can the seams that mark the distance between Cide Hamete’s text and the *morisco*’s; as translator he is not afraid to abandon the letter for the spirit, to mediate in order to export meaning from one context and import it to another. But his translation—perhaps like all instances of figural translation—goes so far as to forget its loyalty, editing Cide Hamete’s text to the point of leaving it behind, openly criticizing its excesses and shortcomings. Since, in the fictional economy of *Don Quixote*, we don’t have access to the “original,” we might understand the *morisco*’s adulterations as rendering a kind of violence on their forebear, oedipally killing it and then taking its place.

And yet this alignment doesn’t quite hold up: we might say one goes too far, the other not far enough. On one hand, because Pierre Menard’s text achieves in its “second language” the same kind of idiomatic fluency that Cervantes’s text achieves in the first (or, alternately, because Pierre Menard achieves in a third language the same kind of fluency that the *morisco aljamiado* translator achieves in the second language and that Cide Hamete ostensibly achieved in the first language, always inaccessible, never mind that all three languages might be identical). The Borgesian narrator’s comments on the *naturalidad* of Menard’s fragmentary *Don Quixote* supports this reading. There are, after all, no clumsy *calce de Villa Iacome* in Menard’s prose.

What is more, the assertion of a radical difference between Cervantes’s “verdad cuya madre es la historia” and Menard’s “verdad cuya madre es la historia,” the first a mere rhetorical praise of history, according to the narrator, the second qualified as an “idea asombrosa,” further troubles the alignment, suggesting that literality is anything but. Indeed the claim of verbal identity is immediately qualified; the texts are identical but mathematically (economically even) unequal: “El texto de Cervantes y el de Menard son verbalmente idénticos, pero el segundo es casi infinitamente más rico. (Más ambiguo dirán sus detractores, pero la ambigüedad es una riqueza.)” (449). The richness that has mysteriously accrued on the second version (a richness Menard’s detractors would challenge and call by another name) is a function of

its status as translation, an effect of its having been ferried into a new context that renders the words more ambiguous despite being identical. We might argue that Cervantes already intuited this: that the novel's playful shifting of authorship from Cervantes to the narrator to Cide Hamete to the *morisco* translator, occupied and dis-occupied as both reader and writer, taps into this very value; or, alternatively, that *Don Quixote* effectively translates chivalric romance into a new reality and, in so doing, changes its value. But the increased worth of Menard's text in comparison to Cervantes's suggests that even a word for word translation into the same language alters value: translation, even of the most literal sort, is never governed by a one-to-one exchange rate, but is subject to intense inflations and devaluations. It reminds words as it moves them across borders.

On the other hand, the seemingly figural translation of our *morisco* is haunted by a kind of literalness, particularly if we consider the possibility (one the text holds out to us) that the text he translates is, like the translator himself, *aljamiado*: Spanish dressed in Arabic letters, a hybrid language that seems one thing but is another (or rather is both things and at the same time neither, or rather is one thing to the eyes and another to the ears and still another on—or in—the *lengua*), and that requires a letter for letter translation that is literally more literal than the word for word.<sup>6</sup> Or, equally worrisome for our second alignment, the possibility that Cide Hamete's text—the one we read in translation or the one that no longer exists—is more akin to Melquiades's manuscript in *Cien años de soledad* and already anticipates all the authorial, translational instances that seem grafted onto it, including the translator's comments on the author's insufficiencies. The playful way that Cervantes's text lingers at moments of real or (usually) feigned composition of the text as well as the repeated instances that monstrously

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6 For a beautiful reading of the use of *aljamiado* in *Don Quixote*, see María Rosa Menocal's *Ornament of the World*: "In the sixteenth century, [*aljamiado*] was the last vestige of the language that had once been the marker, in medieval Spain, of culture itself. [...] *Aljamiado* is another Quixote-like twist, not unlike the ersatz Arabic décor of the Church of San Roman, at the top of Toledo[...]. *Aljamiado*, like the Moriscos themselves, is part of the Cervantine repertoire of tragic identity tricks. Cervantes did not have to invent this one, however, because, as with Avellaneda and his rogue "part two," historical reality provided it for him" (259-60).

exceed even the most liberal understanding of a translational contract (Cide Hamete's or the translator's or the second-author's interruptions of the text, interruptions that multiply throughout part 2) complicate even further the geometry of this alignment.

If translation into the same language represents a case of an *obra invisible*, to borrow the words of Menard's eulogizer, there is a passage that offers us a text even more invisible, raising the specter of the work never written, a version so ideal that it cannot be materialized. It appears in the exact center of Borges's text, as the narrator continues citing the letter ostensibly written by Menard five years earlier, only to interrupt the citation in order to gloss it, rehearsing in the process something that echoes interlineal translation.

“Mi empresa no es difícil, esencialmente” leo en otro lugar de la carta. “Me bastaría ser inmortal para llevarla a cabo.” ¿Confesaré que suelo imaginar que la terminó y que leo el *Quijote*—todo el *Quijote*—como si lo hubiera pensado Menard? Noches pasadas, al hojear el capítulo XXVI—no ensayado nunca por él—reconocí el estilo de nuestro amigo y como su voz en esta frase excepcional: *las ninfas de los ríos, la dolorosa y húmida Eco*. (447)

There is much to concern us in this passage, from the false recognition that suggests a kind of backwards echo—contagion even—that moves from Menard to Cervantes (the narrator does not recognize Cervantes in Menard, but the other way round); to the “como” that qualifies the voice that is recognized, transforming it into something that is not quite a voice or not quite his voice (“como su voz”); to the attribution of exceptionality to a line that seems almost a throwaway in Cervantes's text (but that is anything but, especially when we re-read it in Pierre Menard's in-existent version), and whose very status as exceptional is threatened by the recognition that effectively doubles it, wresting from it any claims to singularity. Like everything else in Borges, where little is left to chance, and like the choice of chapters of *Don Quixote* that Menard actually manages to write, it is no accident that the narrator should hear echoes of Menard in a passage that deals

with Echo; we might propose, in fact, that Menard's translation—or indeed translation more broadly—is a kind of motivated echo, both like and unlike the words it deforms and transforms through repetition.

Neither is it an accident that the passage should appear in chapter 26 of *Don Quixote*, “donde se prosiguen las finezas que de enamorado hizo don Quijote en Sierra Morena,” a chapter that resounds with echo effects and that testifies to the productiveness of repetition's failures. Chapter 26, which represents the exact midpoint of part I, narrates the continuation of Don Quixote's penance in the Sierra Morena. The previous chapter closes with Sancho's departure to deliver a letter to Dulcinea—now revealed as Aldonza Lorenzo—and cash in a letter of credit, with Don Quixote, “en carnes y en pañales” doing cartwheels. Twenty-six opens with Don Quixote's further considerations on whether his penance should repeat—should translate—Amadís's mad melancholy or Orlando's mad fury.<sup>7</sup> Significantly, he opts against the acausal imitation of Orlando—“¿cómo puedo imitalle en las locuras, si no le imito en la ocasión dellas?” (1.26:291)—choosing rather to imitate Amadís's penance: “Viva la memoria de Amadís y sea imitado de don Quijote de la Mancha” (1.26:291). But the motivation—the causality—behind that imitation is immediately revealed as equally flawed, as he is neither “desechado ni desdeñado de Dulcinea del Toboso” (1.26:291). We might read Don Quixote's predicament—one he resolves with the performative thrust of a declaration of sufficiency based on absence (“bástame, como ya he dicho, estar ausente de ella” [1.26:291])—in terms of our two models of translation, or the impossibility of both. In the end Don Quixote translates the penance of his chivalric father and stepfather neither literally (“verbum pro verbum”) nor ideally (“según el sentido”). His imitation is an echo that repeats and deforms, that cannot be anything but radically unfaithful, and that is, in fact, more unfaithful the more faithful it is. We might find here a key to the parody of *Don Quixote*. But questions immediately arise. Can Don Quixote translate Amadís's or Orlando's penance without occupying their subject positions? Can Pierre Menard or the *morisco* write or translate *Don*

7 Parts of the argument that I elaborate in the following paragraphs appear in my essay “España abierta: Cervantes y el *Quijote*.”

*Quixote* as themselves and not as Cervantes or Cide Hamete? The chapter closes with Sancho's wonderfully deforming echo of Don Quixote's phrase "Alta y soberana" into "alta y sobajada," yet another dis- or remembering that productively disfigures through repetition: another case of renegade translation (1.26:296).

As if that were not enough, there are further echoes of chapter 26 in part 2 of *Don Quixote* and, in particular, in part two's own chapter 26 that narrates the adventure of Maese Pedro's puppet show, the most striking reflection in the novel on the limits and possibilities of re-presentation, and on the costs of mistaking an echo for a voice, a history for the event it repeats, a translation (Menard's, Cervantes's, the *morisco aljamiado's*, Gines de Pasamonte's, Maese Pedro's) for an original. Following this line, it is no accident that the puppet show includes an *intérprete*, interpreter or translator, who introduces the show as a literal interpretation ("al pie de la letra" [2.26:846]) of the events it translates on stage or that the faithlessness of the interpreter's translation (now not only of the events but of their staged repetition) should be called out by Don Quixote, who claims to be unable to suspend disbelief on account of it. But suspend he does, mistaking the stringed action of the *retablo* for the inexistent real thing, forgetting the translated nature of the copy, its status as echo. The words Don Quixote uses when he at last acknowledges his error are worth noting.

Real y verdaderamente os digo, señores que me oís, que a mí me pareció todo lo que aquí ha pasado que pasaba *al pie de la letra*: que Melisendra era Melisendra, don Gaiferos don Gaiferos, Marsilio Marsilio, y Carlomagno Carlomagno. (2.26:852)

Not only do they measure a startling distance between Melisendra and Melisendra, don Gaiferos and don Gaiferos, a distance that suggests that even word for word translation into the same language is riddled with difference, but the repetition of each of the names ("don Gaiferos don Gaiferos," "Marsilio Marsilio," "Carlomagno Carlomagno") sounds to the ear something like an echo effect, an echo

that in this case does not disfigure at the level of the letter, but somewhere else altogether.

The echoes do not end there. Cervantes's part 2, chapter 26 is also an echo of a "translation" of *Don Quixote* written by an earlier Menard (i.e., Avellaneda), specifically Avellaneda's chapter 26 which records a similar scene. There, Don Quixote attacks a group of actors at an inn rehearsing a scene from a play by Lope. (It is likely that Cervantes read Avellaneda's novel before adding his chapter 26 to the manuscript of his own *segunda parte*, or in the very least numbered it 26 after reading Avellaneda). The two Don Quixotes (we might say three if we add Menard's invisible, unfinished work) utter almost identical words in their respective frenzies: Avellaneda's in defense of the Queen of Navarre; Cervantes's in defense of Melisendra and don Gaiferos. The Maese Pedro episode is framed, moreover, by the Braying Adventure of part 2, chapter 25 and the Braying Battle of part 2, chapter 27, fitting bookends that lay out of the traps and seductions of excessively faithful repetition.

But, lest we continue infinitely chasing echoes, I want to return to the specific phrase that attracts the attention of Menard's questionable eulogizer and, specifically, to its overdetermined last word: "*las ninfas de los ríos, la dolorosa y húmida Eco*" (447). The full sentence in Cervantes's *Don Quixote* narrates the knight's call for a response from Echo, precisely as he awaits the response from Dulcinea that will either end his penance (if she accepts his gift) or (if she refuses it) condemn him to a madness so profound that it will end his suffering.

Otros muchos escribió; pero como se ha dicho, no se pudieron sacar en limpio, ni enteros, más destas tres coplas. En esto, y en suspirar, y en llamar a los faunos y silvanos de aquellos bosques, a las ninfas de los ríos, a la dolorosa y húmida Eco, que le respondiese, consolasen y escuchasen, se entretenía, y en buscar algunas yerbas con que sustentarse en tanto que Sancho volvía; que, si como tardó tres días, tardara tres semanas, el Caballero de la Triste Figura quedara tan desfigurado, que no le conociera la madre que lo parió. (I.26:293)

But the narrator of Menard interrupts the clause at its most vulnerable juncture, where it is liable to open up to the infinite postponement or infinite response not just of Dulcinea, but of Echo. This has much to do with Echo herself (or itself) and her (or its) relation to the possibility of translation, of a repetition that both preserves and disfigures.

There is another scene we might turn to here to help us trace the shape of this relation. It is the text of Babel of Genesis 11 that narrates the origin of the multiplicity of languages and the need for translation in the first place.

- [1] And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.
  - [2] And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.
  - [3] And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.
  - [4] And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.
  - [5] And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.
  - [6] And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.
  - [7] Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.
  - [8] So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.
  - [9] Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.
- (Genesis 11:1-9)

Echo, I want to suggest, functions in the Cervantine-Menardian passage in a way analogous to the way Derrida suggests the word Babel functions in the text of *Babel*.<sup>8</sup>

Now this proper name, which already names at least three times and three different things, [the proper name of God, the tower or city that takes its name from that event of God proclaiming his proper name, and the narrative text telling its story] also has, this is the whole point, as proper name, the function of a common noun. The story recounts, among other things, the origin of the confusion of tongues, the irreducible multiplicity of idioms, the necessary and impossible task of translation, its necessity as impossibility. (109)

Echo is at once a proper name (the name of a deity), the name of the story behind the name, and a common noun that names repetition itself, a repetition that chiasmically migrates back to proper (or in its migrant state, improper) name.

Echo is both the nymph rendered speechless on account of her babbling loquacity and the trace she leaves, a verbal phantom that lingers too long and is lost. Ovid recounts her story in Book 3 of the *Metamorphoses*, here cited in Horace Gregory's translation:

In those days, Echo was far more than voice;  
She had a body and, though garrulous,  
No further gifts of speech than now: in short,  
The art of taking, from much said, the last

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8 The example of Babel held particular fascination for Derrida; according to Bennington, he returns to it repeatedly throughout his work, not only in "Des Tours de Babel" but in *The Post Card, Acts of Literature*, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone," *The Ear of the Other*, and "Two Words for Joyce." Bennington writes: "The essential fact hangs on this: by imposing his name (confusedly perceived as 'confusion') against the name (Shem), God imposes both the necessity and the impossibility of translation. The dispersion of the tribes and languages on earth will condemn them to confusion, and therefore to the need to translate each other without ever managing to achieve the proper translation, which would come back down to the imposition of a single language" (174-75). No less important for Derrida is the play between proper name and common noun that the example of Babel materializes.



a threat to Narcissus, one burdened with the weight of prophecy: “Mueras [...] Enamorado [...] De ti” (593).<sup>9</sup>

The dual nature of Echo is suggestive for our models of translation, since, and following Derrida, the “conceptual generality” of the common noun (echo) is infinitely translatable, but the “singular destiny” of the proper name (Echo) “remains forever untranslatable” and can only be rendered as identical to itself, performing then (through translation, or its impossibility) the very effect that seemed the province of the common noun (109). Echo conflates the extremes of translatability and untranslatability, of causal and acausal repetition, of literal and figural translation. And like Babel, Echo/echo exists (perhaps exists only) in the translation between its two incarnations, which chiasmically contaminate one another. Let me cite Derrida again, and then mis-translate his musings on Babel onto Echo’s absent body:

[J]ust as Babel is at once proper name and common noun, confusion also becomes proper name and common noun, the one as homonym of the other, the synonym as well, but not the equivalent, because there could be no question of confusing them in their value [...]. It is as if there were two words there, two homonyms, one of which has the value of proper name and the other that of common noun: between the two, a translation which one can evaluate quite diversely. (109-10)

How do we evaluate the translation between Echo and echo? Might that infinitesimal (or infinite) space house the translation between

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9 Covarrubias’s definition of *ECCO* is equally suggestive for a reading of translation. Not only does it inscribe accounts of echo as both proper name and common noun but also, in yet another untranslatable echo that lies seductively between the literal and figural possibilities of translation, as idiom: “Ecco, escribe Ovidio, lib. 3. *Metamorphoseon*, aver sido Echo, una Nimpha, la qual enamorada del muchacho Narciso y viéndose desfavorecida dél, se fué consumiendo hasta convertirse en piedra, quedándole tan solamente la voz que remeda las últimas palabras del que habla cerca de donde ella está[...]. Echo, vale tanto como sonido, *vel vocis repercusio* [...] fórmase en los valles hondos, y en las cuevas cavernosas, en algunas torres que tienen bóvedas, a donde hiriendo el ayre sinificado por Juno, se multiplican las voces con la repercusión[...]. El mesmo Plinio, lib. 36. cap. 15, haze mencion de siete torres, que en la ciudad de Cyrico davan a una voz siete respuestas. Quando uno que no sabe mucho va a sombra de otro que es discreto, por parecerlo él, repite las postreras razones del compañero, del qual solemos dezir ser su echo” (492).

Cervantes and Menard, between Cide Hamete and the *morisco aljamiado*?

Borges's narrator continues: "Esa conjunción eficaz de un adjetivo moral y otro físico me trajo a la memoria un verso de Shakespeare que discutimos una tarde" (447). It becomes nearly impossible to discern—pointing to the ways in which the crisscrossings in Borges or Cervantes already anticipate any sort of a posteriori chiasmus we wish to read through them—which of the two descriptors is the moral adjective and which the physical one. If humidity is physical, it is also—and certainly according to early modern humoral theory—explicitly tied to the moral realm. And the possibility of parsing some moral sense of pain that excludes the physical register seems, at best, doomed to failure. We might think here of our literal and figural translation models, and of the ways both fail any test of ultimate loyalty.

The radical instability between Echo's physical and moral attributes attaches itself to the Shakespearean verse from *Othello* that the narrator remembers and immediately cites untranslated: "*Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk*" (447). As with *dolorosa y húmida*, it is impossible to decide which is the moral attribute and which is the physical. Such instability might serve as a reminder of the dangers of reading practices that conflate morality with physical features (that read turbans as malignancy), practices we have seen too much of in recent years. But perhaps more interesting is the word *Turk* that ends the verse and that we might now—through Borges and Cervantes, Menard and Cide Hamete, Derrida and Ovid—reread as both proper name and common noun: like Babel and Echo, at once translatable and untranslatable.

This duality seems particularly suggestive for early modern Turkey, and for the place it occupied in the Renaissance European cultural imagination, a seductive, threatening position, precariously situated between inside and outside, between desire and derision. There are countless examples of this beyond *Othello*, not only on the stages of Elizabethan England or Golden Age Spain, but in numerous political, theological, and geographical tracts that sought to chart and categorize the peoples of the world according to a moral order. For example, in a section entitled *República de los Turcos* of his 1575/1595 *Tercera parte de las repúblicas del mundo divididas en tres partes*, Jerónimo Román writes:

Para fin de la Republica Gentilicia, quise poner la de los Turcos y Moros al cabo, pareciendome despues de aver tratado una lection tan larga y varia, al fin topassen con una cosa la mayor que se podia dessear, porque aviendo escripto las Republicas, de las gentes en comun, y al cabo la de las Indias Occidentales, viendo esta que es tan enemiga de la religion Christiana, se viessen cosas particulares, y como siendo gobernada por un tyranno y sin ley va tan estendida y como se conserva. (237v)

Here the Turk's liminal status ("al cabo")—which joins that of the Moor—determines its proper place in Román's narrative mapping: last by virtue of its grandeur; an object of fear that must be postponed ("al fin topassen"), but also of desire that the deferral banks on ("la mayor que se podía dessear"); a heretical nation ruled by tyranny ("sin ley") but of an imperial breadth ("tan estendida") and depth ("se conserva") that Spain would do well to echo.<sup>10</sup> The Turk is that which at once can and cannot be aptly translated: the other side of the mirror that is European or Other, both and neither. The opening line of Covarrubias's definition of *turco* is equally suggestive: "TURCO. Esta nación es más conocida de lo que avíamos menester [...]" (983). Not only does it register European anxieties about Ottoman imperial expansion (the Turks are too well known precisely "por aver venido a señorear tan gran parte del orbe," as the definition goes on to say), but it also defines the Turk in terms of an excess for definition: a figure, a nation, that is at once too known and, in the end, unknowable, resistant to translation.

But the question of the translatability or untranslatability of "Turk"—as common noun or proper name, in terms of faith or betrayal—is no less useful for thinking about Turkey in more recent years; whether in 1934 (when Menard was writing or translating his *Don Quixote*, the very year that Turkish parliament adopted the Surname Law and presented the Republic's first President, Mustafa Kemal, with the honorific surname "Atatürk," effectively making "Turk" his proper name); or in 1939 (when "Pierre Menard" is signed by the narrator

<sup>10</sup> Recall that in 1595, Spain was in a period of severe decline.

under the byline, “Nîmes, 1939,” accusatorily pointing towards Vichy); or in 2011 (when Turkey continues to press its contentious bid to enter the European Union.<sup>11</sup> We might well extend this duality—the simultaneous surrender and resistance to translation, the migration back and forth between proper name and common noun—to any other designation of national origin, of that which names us in relation to the national, or something like the national: words that adamantly resist translation but that exist only in the translation that marks their boundaries, both physical *and* moral. The adequacy or inadequacy of those same terms to name the very languages into which this sort of quasi-national designation can and cannot be translated (*español* and *español*, for instance but “*arábigo y manchego*”) suggests yet another turn of the screw.

Questions of translatability and untranslatability seem at once especially apt and especially fraught for thinking about our *morisco aljamiado*, not only, as we have seen, for his work as faithful or unfaithful translator, but for his very status in *Don Quixote* and in Don Quixote’s Spain. Indeed, his naming in the text, in seeming (and only seeming) contrast to that of Cide Hamete Benengeli (or Berenjena), hangs precariously between common and proper, drawing as it does on ethno-racial, religious, and linguistic categories that were and are always already *improper*. Like Echo/echo, like translation itself, “morisco” and “aljamiado” are weighted by memory and nostalgia. “Morisco” in particular functions much like the name “Rocinante” does: by naming what used to be (and in theory is no more), but somehow stubbornly remains as an inescapable echo, in the word if nowhere else. (By the time part 2 of *Don Quixote* is published, these tensions will reach fever pitch, and the impossibility of translating *morisco(s) aljamiado(s)* will have other costs and other meanings.) Covarrubias’s uncharacteristically economic definition of *morisco*, casting doubt on the genuineness or the efficacy of conversion, is telling: “Moriscos. Los convertidos de moros a la Fe Católica, y si ellos son católicos, gran merced les ha hecho Dios y a nosotros también” (815). But even in the absence of

11 While it smacks of a kind of presentism to find the ghost of the EU lurking in Shakespeare’s or Cervantes’s Turks, such an interpretation, in this case, seems entirely justified.

doubt, in those cases of “gran merced,” “morisco” im/properly names the vestigial trace that marks the failure of conversion to forget, but also its failure to remember. That failure, we might argue, haunts any conversion, whether at the level of blood or water, of air or word. A phantom limb, it is both the promise and the risk of translation.

Borges and Derrida, with Shakespeare and Cervantes, can help us formulate a critique of those colonial projects that produce the disalignments of national and linguistic borders; but also, more profoundly, of the alignments themselves, of any project, metaphysical or military, that seeks to assert the primacy of one language, or of one culture, or of one nation—or indeed of one translation—over another. They can also help us formulate a critique—one that becomes especially poignant in the Ricote episode of part 2, chapter 54—of practices that confuse the particularity of the proper name with the conceptual generality of the common one, and which allow the betrayal of one translator, or Turk, or *morisco aljamiado*, to be synecdochically translated to all. We might recall here the *morisco* Ricote’s words, words he utters “sin tropezar nada en su lengua morisca, en la pura castellana,” words that radically undermine the apparent apology for the expulsion in which they are nested: “no porque todos fuésemos culpados, que algunos había firmes y verdaderos” (2.54:1072). Turk or *morisco aljamiado*, “*arábigo y manchego*,” the very categories to which we ascribe the status and the apparent untranslatability of the proper name are always already inflected or infected with the lower case mutability of the common noun; conversely the common noun is always in peril of becoming an allegory of itself, a function the “Turk” and the *morisco* serve all too well in the early modern literary and historical imagination.

By way of conclusion, I will simply point out two directions we might follow, one via Shakespeare, one via Cervantes, both “translated” by Menard. The first involves a nod to another translator figure explicitly inscribed in Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, and most definitely lurking (invisibly) in Menard’s: the renegade who appears in the Captive’s tale without a proper name but who is designated by the Captain as “Grande amigo mío” and who translates the notes that change hands between Ruy Pérez de Viedma and Zoraida. The renegade is both

outside and inside various laws and languages, in a state of sustained instability, that not only underscores the continuities—material *and* figural—between acts of linguistic and religious and monetary conversions—translations all—but indefinitely postpones the assignment of any seemingly fixed identity, be it racial, religious, national, or ultimately linguistic. It will surprise no one to know that renegades were known in Cervantes's and Shakespeare's Spain as *turcos de profesión*.

The second direction returns to *Othello*, and to what precedes, but mostly what follows the verse Menard imports. It is the lines that Othello utters as he commits suicide, and that suggest that he too is a *turco de profesión*.

And say besides that in Aleppo once,  
Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk  
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,  
I took by th' throat the circumcised dog  
And smote him—thus (5.2: vv. 413-417; 265)

It is a well-studied moment in which Othello simultaneously and fatally occupies the positions of Moor, Venetian, and Turk; a moment in which the exotic is annexed and, at the same time, rendered so unassimilable as to require smiting. We might use this in support of the reading we have been circling around, about how that which names the subject in relation to the state is at once utterly susceptible and utterly immune to translation: a common name that can be put on or taken off as easily as a turban and a proper name that no act of conversion can erase. But I would simply point out what happens to the state in the hands of our malignant and turbaned Turk: it is traduced, *traducido*. Perhaps this, ultimately, is where Menard's translation into the same language brings us: to the traduced state—betrayed and translated—landscape of Babelian spires and echo-haunted Sierra Morena, and to the always uncertain homes we make in language, that most intimate and foreign of exiles.

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