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TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

Metaphor translated: Figurative language in two  
Spanish versions of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of  
Grass*.

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## ABSTRACT

The present study performs an analysis of the translation of metaphors in Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, arguably one of his most important works, and representative of his main themes: love, friendship or sexuality; the divinity of man, democracy, nature; or the community of the human race. Specifically, the analysis focuses on the poem "Song of Myself" and the handling of figurative language by two Spanish-language translators: Eduardo Moga and Jorge Luis Borges. Both successfully attempt to convey the full impact of Whitman's striking metaphors, yet each does so according to his distinctive poetics (in turn shaped by literary influences and personal circumstances) and his views on literary translation. Our graduation project tries to qualify their similarities and differences as regards the translation of Whitman's metaphors and metaphor-related figures of speech.

Keywords: Translation, Metaphors, Walt Whitman, Jorge Luis Borges, Eduardo Moga, *Leaves of Grass*

## RESUMEN

El presente estudio realiza un análisis de la traducción de las metáforas en la obra de Walt Whitman *Leaves of Grass*, con toda seguridad una de sus obras más importantes y representativa de sus temas principales: el amor, la amistad o la sexualidad; la divinidad del hombre, la democracia, la naturaleza; o la comunidad de la raza humana. Específicamente, el análisis se centra en el poema "Song of Myself" y en el manejo del lenguaje figurado por parte de dos traductores de lengua hispana: Eduardo Moga y Jorge Luis Borges. Ambos intentan con éxito transmitir el impacto total de las llamativas metáforas de Whitman, pero cada uno lo hace de acuerdo con su propia poética (a su vez moldeada por influencias literarias y circunstancias personales) y sus puntos de vista sobre la traducción literaria. El presente TFG aborda sus similitudes y diferencias con respecto a la traducción de las metáforas de Whitman y otras figuras del discurso relacionadas con la metáfora.

Palabras clave: Traducción, metáforas, Walt Whitman, Jorge Luis Borges, Eduardo Moga, *Hojas de Hierba*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The present study performs an analysis of the translation of metaphors in Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, arguably one of his most important works, and representative of his main themes: love, friendship or sexuality; the divinity of man, democracy, nature; or the community of the human race. Specifically, the analysis focuses on the poem "Song of Myself" and the handling of figurative language by two Spanish-language translators: Eduardo Moga and Jorge Luis Borges. Both successfully attempt to convey the full impact of Whitman's striking metaphors, yet each does so according to his distinctive poetics (in turn shaped by literary influences and personal circumstances) and his views on literary translation. My graduation project aims to qualify the similarities and differences of both versions as regards the translation of Whitman's metaphors and metaphor-related figures of speech.

I will start by providing a brief background section to contextualize the subject of analysis, the work and its author, including a reference to the major themes of *Leaves of Grass* and some background information about the poet supported by bibliographic sources.

Next, the main assumptions and objectives will be laid down. The present study's approach is hypothetical and deductive, in the sense that it sets out to validate the hypotheses that have been previously formulated. More particularly, I will formulate two main hypotheses in relation to the translations under examination, which my later analysis will either confirm or disprove.

Following these preliminary sections, the central part of the project will concern itself with presenting and analyzing the translations of *Leaves of Grass* by Jorge Luis Borges and Eduardo Moga. Before that, however, I shall briefly review other published Spanish versions of Whitman's poetic masterpiece. In the analysis proper, a special emphasis will be laid on the strategies used by Borges and Moga in dealing with Whitman's figurative language.

Given the present study's space constraints, as well as the fact that Borges's translation is partial and does not include all the poems in *Leaves of Grass*, I shall confine my analysis to one of the book's most important poems: "Song of Myself" (1855). The choice of this poem is further supported by the fact that it deals with

Whitman's most central topics, as mentioned above. In order to poetically address them, Whitman filled the poem with images and symbolism. Specific examples, particularly relating to figurative language, will be extracted, discussed, and compared with their Spanish translations.

The analysis and discussion of such examples will rely on standard classifications of translation procedures for figurative language (Newmark, Álvarez, and van den Broeck). In this sense, interventions such as omission, paraphrase, translation 'stricto sensu', modulation, the transformation of the original metaphor into a simile, etc., will be borne in mind with a view to defining overall trends or strategies in the two versions under examination. Ultimately, this analysis aims to ascertain, from a purely descriptive point of view, 1) the levels of fidelity and equivalence of the respective translations by Borges and Moga with regard to Whitman's handling of metaphors, both in terms of tenors and vehicles, and 2) whether divergences between the strategies deployed by both translators reflect specific poetics or views on literary translation.

Such findings and results will be recapitulated in the project's final section, devoted to the study's conclusions, where additionally the initial hypotheses will be either confirmed or declared non valid.





## 2. ASSUMPTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

*Leaves of Grass* (1855), the collection of poems by Walt Whitman (1819-1892), is considered one of the most influential compositions of nineteenth century American poetry. When it made its controversial appearance in the literary scene, it was criticized by its treatment of topics, its writing style, and its structure. Nevertheless, some critics including notable transcendentalist writer and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson supported this new form of writing, which eventually met with success.

Whitman's masterpiece, moreover, became a major contribution to the growth and renovation of American literature and poetry. As Navarro claims, "Es el gesto original de Whitman: renovar la concepción del amor cristiano (proponiendo una nueva), favorecer el deseo corporal (sexual) como parte indispensable del conocimiento de la realidad y de la alteridad, y, por tanto, de uno mismo." (n.pag.) Whitman's style was an innovative type of poetic idiom, beginning with his use of free verse and his handling of changes in line length.

Both the collection's foreword and its several poems have been translated into many languages. In this graduation project I shall focus on the Spanish versions by Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) and Eduardo Moga (1962). Moga's version is the first complete and bilingual Spanish/English translation of *Leaves of Grass*. It stands out because it is part of a comprehensive work that includes the prefaces of the different editions of this poetry collection that Whitman produced (Carabante 189). Hence, it has been considered one of the most accomplished and thorough translations of this book because of Moga's attention to detail and his commitment to the original text. By contrast, the translation by Jorge Luis Borges is partial since it excludes a significant portion of the literary compositions of the original poetry book. As Costa states, "Borges traduce con fervor religioso *Canto a mí mismo* y una selección de Hojas de Hierba" (48). Despite the different scope of each translation, I would like to argue that a comparison between both can produce interesting results.

The main focus of this analysis is the rendering of Whitman's metaphors (and figurative language in general) in *Leaves of Grass*. Part of Whitman's "enhanced influence" (Umaña 74) derives from his management of rhetorical devices in combination with his use of symbolism. Edlund argues that "Whitman put much effort into using rhetorical devices and a traditional framework as a literary basis for his

writing” (25). Based on this idea, I will mainly try to address the treatment of metaphor and other figurative tropes in the above-mentioned translations of Whitman’s best-known poetic collection. In this sense, the principal assumptions of this inquiry are as follows:

Moga produces a more faithful translation of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* insofar as both the tenor and the vehicle of the original tropes find a fairly tight equivalence in his target text. His accomplished rendering is characterized by restraint and neatness, as well as by a sound knowledge of the American poet’s figure and poetic universe, which in turn shows in the editions’s introduction including Whitman’s life and work, an assessment of the importance of Whitman’s work, and a commentary on the critical reception of *Leaves of Grass*. Moga is committed to providing the reader with Whitman’s vision.

Borges’s impressive, yet incomplete translation (it only includes a selection of poems and, unlike Moga’s, does not encompass the collection’s process of constant expansion), contains a more personal rewriting, without being exactly unfaithful to the source text. The Argentinian polymath was not a proponent of literal translation and is known to have claimed that translations can be an enrichment of the original (although perhaps ironically, he once mentioned the translations of his own work as an example of the latter). In the case of poetry, he expressed his view in favor of “recreation” (even though for him Whitman’s free verse was perhaps more amenable to a less creative translation strategy) (Fondebrider n.pag). Borges, on the other hand, also published critical output on Walt Whitman, but as we are reminded of by Tomás Eloy Martínez, for whom both writers were in some respects in the antipodes of each other, this does not suggest any special affinity per se, since Borges was an omnivorous commentator (189). Even so, as Benevento states, “Borges may have been one of the few writers who decided to adapt the literary theories he discovered in Whitman to his own fictional practices” (22).

The second hypothesis is supported by the simple fact that Borges’s translation of *Leaves of Grass*, as I claimed earlier, is an incomplete version that only includes a selection of poems. More interestingly, according to Aparicio, Borges made subtle yet necessary changes to create poems that could stand on their own, independent from the

original compositions (131). It may be the case that in Borges's version, some connotations of meaning are morphed or modulated during the process of translation.

Additionally, another possible hypothesis that may be posited about the two translations of *Leaves of Grass* relates to the literary influences that Moga and Borges take as their references. This is because both translators belong to different times and literary periods, which can influence their way of thinking and their poetics. Likewise, their ideologies may affect their way of translating. It is perhaps worth remembering at this point that, in his youth, Borges felt for some time attracted towards Ultraism, a Spanish and Spanish-American literary movement that attached much importance to the use of original striking and pure metaphors. Indeed, the concept of translation as a metaphor of the transformative power of literature and of the reading process itself is one of the philosophical and literary topics that greatly concerned Borges (Aparicio 145). In spite of this, we must acknowledge the fact that the Argentinean writer eventually moved away from the aesthetic principles of Ultraism and focused more on human concerns and on the depth of life. As Lara explains, “es esa profundidad la que, a la vez que lo aleja del ultraísmo, va a simplificarle la frase poética” (12). It is both his Ultraist adscription and the later simplification of his poetic voice (or perhaps the tension between both) that could be relevant in this regard.

In fact, the above hypotheses may be subsumed into a final one: that the natural disparities in the style of translation between both Moga and Borges ultimately derive from the mismatch between their respective universes of literary influences, ideologies, and poetics: in turn the product of each living in different time periods and milieus. Let us remember in this regard that “translation like any other literary product more or less reflects ideology, the less when it is concerned with facts, the more when it is concerned with feelings” (Newmark, *About Translation* 76-77).



### 3. WALT WHITMAN AND *LEAVES OF GRASS*: A FEW BACKGROUND NOTES <sup>1</sup>

Born in 1819 in Long Island, New York, Walt Whitman was raised in a working-class family that moved to Brooklyn, where he began to study in a public school. In addition, he learned on his own through visits to museums, theatres or libraries as well as attending lectures.

In 1830, he stopped studying and began to work as an apprentice at the *Long Island Patriot*, a left-liberal newspaper. His keen interest in journalism dates back to this period, an important landmark during which his first article, “The Olden Time”, was published in 1833. Two successive fires burned the printing press where Whitman worked before he had to return home and serve as a teacher for six years. In 1838, he founded his first newspaper, *The Long-Islander*, but it had to close down, probably through lack of local support and Whitman’s own reluctance to engage in the kind of dedicated working routine that running a newspaper involved. While he returned to teaching, he soon realized that he wanted to be a poet. Later, during the period 1841-48, he published stories in newspapers and magazines, and he would continue to collaborate with media outlets such as the *Evening Post* beyond this timespan. It was in 1842 that he wrote his first novel, *Franklin Evans*.

At the end of June 1855, the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* appeared. It contained ninety-five pages and twelve poems without titles. The edition even included a preface, and although the book cover did not indicate the author’s name, it did exhibit a portrait of Whitman with a carefree attitude. He wrote to several newspapers about the book, but the only intellectual that responded to him was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who in fact had inspired Whitman’s work with his 1844 essay “The Poet”, in which Emerson emphasized the need for the United States to have a genuine national bard. This was the beginning of Whitman’s poetic career.

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<sup>1</sup> In his 2015 translation of *Leaves of Grass* published by Galaxia Gutenberg, Eduardo Moga included a splendid five-section introduction that constitutes an insightful preliminary study. The latter contains a relevant selection of facts about Whitman’s life and works as well as an appraisal of the importance of the poetry collection whose Spanish versions constitute the subject of this project.

In 1856, the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* came out: a pocketbook with three hundred eighty-four pages and thirty-two poems with titles. “Song of Myself” was then named “Poem of Walt Whitman, An American”. He sold just a few copies, and so he began to interact with intellectuals such as Henry David Thoreau. In 1860, some editors proposed the publication of a third edition that would eventually comprise four hundred and fifty-six pages and one hundred and seventy-eight poems, this time arranged in a different order.

Even though Whitman was by then becoming established as a poet, the new edition of *Leaves of Grass* that coincided with the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 was not successful. The poet began to help in hospitals as a nurse, and no doubt his exposure to the horrors of the war influenced his work. Another influence in his development as a poet was the death of Abraham Lincoln, an emblem of American democracy. In May 1865, he published *Drum-Taps*, composed of fifty-three poems, and in late October that year, a sequel appeared with eighteen additional poems including his famous “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd”, an elegy to the assassinated President Lincoln.

In 1867, the fourth edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published, with six new poems and this time omitting the author’s picture. The book consisted of four hundred and forty-four pages and expressed the need to rebuild the country after the war. In 1871, a fifth edition was released, with thirty-six new poems and a preface. This was followed in 1876 by the sixth edition of the constantly growing compilation, now printed in two volumes. The first volume aimed to commemorate the centennial of the United States Declaration of Independence, and the second included a combination of prose essays and poetry. From then on, Whitman achieved the status of a truly important writer. The following edition was written in 1881 and fixed the final structure of the work. Even so, two more editions were still to be published, respectively in 1889 and 1891. The latter is known as *The Deathbed Edition*, since Whitman would die in 1892. This last edition is divided into two volumes. The first volume includes a total of three hundred and eighty-nine poems, and the second volume is a collection of writings in prose.

Since *Leaves of Grass* took so many years to reach its final edition, this work ended up by being a reflection of American society as well as a powerful influence in

later American poetry. We may safely say that *Leaves of Grass* showcases Whitman's overall evolution as a poet even though his literary output includes other collections of verse such as *November Boughs* (1888), which contains sixty-four poems, and prose essays like the classic *Democratic Vistas* (1871), incidentally included in the sixth edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

Numerous biographies of Whitman have been published. Special mention must be made of the 1883 account of Whitman's life by Richard Maurice Bucke. This biography is important because it was supervised by the poet himself and covers the main episodes of his life. Also important are Gay Wilson Allen's *A Critical Biography of Walt Whitman* (1955) and Jerome Loving's *Walt Whitman: the Song of Himself* (2000), translated by Carlos Roche Suárez in 2002.





#### 4. OTHER SPANISH TRANSLATIONS OF *LEAVES OF GRASS*

*Leaves of Grass* has been repeatedly translated into several languages. In the introduction that precedes Moga's translation, Moga refers to the Spanish (and Catalan) versions of Whitman's magnum opus in chronological order (78-94). Moga reminds us, for example, that a translation was first published in Spain in the Catalan language by Cebrià Montoliu in 1909. It was titled *Fulles d'Herba* and contained twenty-four poems and a preface.

The next translation was done by the Uruguayan Armando Vasseur in 1912. Umaña argues that "es una antología que apenas si incluye cerca de una cuarta parte de la totalidad de los poemas" (74). Moga agrees with this statement since he claims that it is "una versión parcial, y de hecho, relativamente pequeña de la producción total de Whitman" (79). This translation was published in several editions until 1953 when it appeared with a foreword by Vasseur himself, who was criticized for the introduction of many modifications that were unsupported by the source text.

In 1941, León Felipe translated *Leaves of Grass* into Spanish. It was composed of a prologue in verse and nine poems (Moga 54). Umaña qualifies this as a free translation that distorts the original work (75). In fact, it is generally referred to as a paraphrase, one that altered many details of the original, including locations, and the age, physical condition, and sex of the characters mentioned, or the actions described. Hence, it is considered by many authors as a personal translation in which León Felipe seems to be the author himself. Borges himself judged this translation as "erroneous and periphrastic" (Gargatagli 68-70), while according to Frau, for instance, León Felipe used elements and typical expressions of his own poetry, such as correlations (18). A few years later, there appeared another selection of Whitman's poems in Spanish. It was done by the Chilean poet Concha Zardoya in 1945 and titled *Cantando a la primavera*, although subsequently it would come to be called *Obras Escogidas*.

From then on, partial Spanish renderings of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, some of them remarkable, would follow. Moga himself highlights some of them in his 2015 edition for Galaxia Gutenberg. The first one he mentions is *Walt Whitman, canto de la democracia. Ensayo biográfico y breve antología*, by Miguel R. Mendoza (1946). This publication was followed by *La última vez que florecieron las lilas en el patio*, by

Arturo Torres Rioseco (1946), Gregorio Gasman's 1949 *Saludo al mundo*, and the 1953 collection *Poesía*, by José María Espinós.

The first full translation into Spanish was made by Francisco Alexander in 1953 and was finally revised and edited by Editorial Visor in 2006. Alexander maintained, like Moga, that it is important to translate the complete collection by Whitman. In the words of Moga, “la traducción de Alexander es diligente, e incluye, además, cuatro de los cinco prólogos que Whitman incorporó a las sucesivas ediciones del poemario” (82). This publication reflects a standard of fidelity that, as we will see in a later section of this study, characterizes Moga's own endeavor.

The subsequent known translation was written by Borges (1969). Suffice it to say, for the time being, that from Moga's point of view, Borges's translation is the best of all those published since it is the most accurate and literary of all available (84). Borges only translated “Song of Myself,” and some poems from *Children of Adam* and *Calamus*. After the Borges version, we find another succession of partial translations. These include, among others, the following: *Hojas de Hierba*, by Leandro Wolfson (1976); *Hojas de Hierba. Antología bilingüe*, by Manuel Villar Raso (1995); or more recent translations such as *La extensión de mi cuerpo*, by Antonio Rivero Taravillo (2014). Despite being a partial translation, Wolfson's version arguably possesses the additional merit of containing the most interesting work of the whole set. This is because Wolfson's translation includes a sound critical apparatus featuring numerous final notes.

Together with these partial attempts, two more complete translations supplement the above-mentioned work by Francisco Alexander: those by Pablo Mañé (1978) and Pablo Ingberg (2009). Ingberg's translation deserves special consideration because it is full of strange and even unintelligible neologisms.

Finally, Moga contributed in 2015 a complete and bilingual edition of *Leaves of Grass* that I intend to discuss next. His version has had five editions, although we will be using the fourth one. As mentioned earlier, the fourth edition includes an introduction with details about Whitman's life and work, an analysis of the contemporary (mainly negative) critical response, and an assessment of the overall significance of *Leaves of Grass*. It also includes notes and final references. It is considered a full and definitive translation as it follows the structure established by

Whitman in his final edition. As Moga claims, “Traducir solo la primera edición, o una parte cualquiera de su obra, supone sustraer al lector una parte sustancial, y muy meritoria, de su hercúlea labor como poeta” (94).



## 5. ANALYSIS

### 5.1 A brief note on the translation of metaphors

The translation of metaphors is one of the most complex issues for a translator. As Lakoff and Johnson already explained in their classic monograph (1980), there has been considerable development in the theory of metaphor, particularly within the cognitive sciences. It is beyond the scope of this paper to develop a minimally complete discussion of this issue, but it may be worthwhile to review some simple and even practical notions, especially within the area of translation studies. The main components of metaphors were already defined by I.A. Richards, the first to use the terms “vehicle” and “tenor” together in regards to metaphors. “Vehicle” alludes to the image and “tenor” to “the idea conveyed in the vehicle” (qtd in Álvarez 481). For M. Blacks, a metaphor “is not an isolated term, but a sentence” (qtd. in Álvarez 481), and it is necessary to read the entire sentence to interpret the images. Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson state that when there is a metaphor, there is a change in the domain of experience (qtd. in Álvarez 479).

More specifically in terms of metaphor and translation, according to Newmark, there are five types of metaphors (106-112). The first group is composed of the so-called dead metaphors, often applied to universal themes such as space, time or everyday human activities. According to Álvarez, some metaphors are in the process of dying and becoming part of a common language (479), i.e. lexicalized (Kittay, qtd. *ibid.*). They are considered easy to translate. The second group consists of cliché metaphors, which have a specific use in occasional contexts. They do not represent feelings or specific psychological motivations. The third group is stock or standard metaphors. Metaphors in this third group are commonly used, and they represent emotions and thoughts. That is why they are trickier to translate or to find an equivalent for. The fourth type of metaphor is recent metaphors. They appear often in computer nomenclature, such as *software*. None of these, including idioms of set phrases pose the same kind of challenge as the type of figurative language that concerns us now: original metaphors, i.e. non-lexicalized figurations where “the metaphorical meaning is not clearly fixed, but varies from context to context, and typically has to be worked out by the reader from context to context” (Dickins 232). Arguably, poetry contains the most original metaphors. They represent the poet’s unique worldview, feelings and emotions,

and personality; they enrich the text with connotation, ambiguity and cultural depth; and their translatability has been challenged by some scholars.

Indeed, the scholarly debate on metaphor translation is broad and varied. Kloepfer (1967) states that it is typically possible to translate metaphors (qtd. in Álvarez 482). On the contrary, Eugène Nida and Vinay and Darbelnet insist that sometimes it is impossible (qtd. in Álvarez 482). A number of scholars, remarkably Van den Broeck (77) and Newmark (482), pragmatically and didactically classify the several procedures available for metaphor translation (482): from literal or “*stricto sensu*” to rendering metaphor as sense (paraphrase), including substitution/modulation of the original vehicle, conversion to a simile or a number of combinations of these strategies.

Original, poetic metaphors heavily depend on context for their interpretation and frequently involve an element of deviation from ordinary language use. This has led some authors to suggest either extremely cautious and literal (nearly word-for-word) strategies or particularly creative ones (Lomheim, qtd. in Park, 167).





## 5.2 JORGE LUIS BORGES

### 5.2.1 The poetics of a writer/translator

Argentina's Jorge Luis Borges is considered one of the most important writers in the whole of twentieth-century world literature. It is very difficult to summarize his full import, but it is easy to agree that "he created a new literary continent between North and South America, between Europe and America, between old worlds and modernity" (Ciabattari n.pag.). He has had a truly universal projection and has been influential on many later writers. His narratives and essays are full of symbolism and among his vast repertoire of influences English-language literature is paramount.

Together with his extensive body of fiction and essay writing, he also wrote poetry. Blanco states that in all of his poems "dominan ampliamente figuras de tipo metonímico, fundadas en la contigüidad" (33). For Borges, a metaphor is a link between two terms that transform one into another (Blanco 29). It is to be expected that he adapted his translations of poetry to his way of understanding metaphor. In fact, Borges once considered that metaphors were the most suitable device in providing a new sense to poetic discourse. That is why in 1919 he began to feel fascinated with a new literary and intellectual movement called Ultraism. It was a literary movement that began in Spain at the end of 1918 and continued until 1922 (Sangoor 253). It emerged after the First World War, and had two leading precursors: Juan Ramón Jiménez and Ramón Gómez de la Serna. Jiménez himself wrote poems using modernistic features such as metaphors and humor. On the other hand, Gómez de la Serna was also an ambassador of the avant-garde movements in Europe (Zayas 9). He published articles in magazines and was a great influence to later writers. According to Ema, Ultraism arose from the need to express emotions and feelings together with an interest in technology (517).

Ultraism mainly focused on the use of metaphors and images. Ultraists considered the poem as an object that results from the superposition of images (Gullón 337). Moreover, Ultraists created striking images, because, for them, the image was the most important device in poetry (340). Creating images was the main way to express the writer's emotions and provide meaning in this new form of poetry. Images were also used to draw the reader's attention by producing novel, unfamiliar forms of artistic expression. Furthermore, Ultraism tried to create a new world full of dynamism and simultaneity of objects (Zayas 13).

Borges himself defined this literary movement: “El Ultraísmo tiende a la meta principal de toda poesía, esta es, a la transmutación de la realidad palpable del mundo en realidad interior y emocional” (Rodríguez 131). In a manifesto entitled “Ultraísmo” (1921), he established the dominant features of this trend. According to Sangoor, they can be summarized as the following: the importance of metaphors, the refusal to use links and ornamental pieces, and the attempt to synthesize the images (272). Thus, the essential element for Borges in writing is the metaphor, originally and economically presented. One of his earliest definitions of this rhetorical device was “una vinculación de dos cosas distintas, una de las cuales se trasiega dentro de la otra” (Blanco 24). Furthermore, Borges established a new classification of types of metaphors (Zonana 307-308). In the first group are metaphors that make abstract things concrete. The second group consists of metaphors that provide a spiritual approach. The third group comprises metaphors that foreground the form of what is described. Next, he highlights those sensory metaphors that relate the aural and the visual. The last category consists of link space and time, and those that set up a contrast between the two concepts.

Borges began to write Ultraist poetry between 1919 and 1921. He discovered the poetic content of everyday objects by using metaphors. This was the main drive behind his Ultraist poetry, as he claims in his first poetry collection *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923): a book of personal and intimate poems written in free verse (which is worth mentioning in connection with his rendering of Whitman). Borges did not avoid metaphors in his poetry and elsewhere in his literary output. Yet, as Rodríguez declares, Borges’s Ultraist period does not last a long time and in 1925, his separation from this movement is perceived (130). Following his own poetic calling, he qualified the Ultraist movement as a mistake (Strong 64) and diminished the importance of this period in his career. Among other things, this involved a return to more traditional metrics, but also the exploration of new forms of free verse (Rodríguez 133).

He had begun to read Whitman through a copy of his most famous collection work in 1924 and felt a great admiration for Whitman’s “Song of Myself”. As Benevento argues, “Whitman has been a consistent hero for Borges, who has written essays about Whitman and even translated and published selections from *Leaves of Grass*” (21). Although Whitman and Borges seem to be very different writers, they shared the belief that man is multiple and composed of all men (Eloy 189). As the American contemporary poet Jeremy Paden claims, “while mature Borges does not

evidence any traditional Whitmanesque influences, early Borges does” (n.pag). Both writers have a few stylistic similarities and, above all, there are some important thematic connections between their respective works.

Probably one of the most important poems in *Leaves of Grass* is “Song of Myself” (1855). This is a poem in which Whitman tries to include all readers. It is composed of fifty-two sections that aim to praise nature, man, and the world. Moreover, “el poeta canta la confianza que el hombre debe tener en sí mismo, saludando al nuevo hombre de la democracia” (Smith 85). It has an optimistic tone reflected in the musicality of its words. According to Navarro, the “I” is the heart of the poem and acquires universal identity (n.pag). Through this extensive poem, Whitman intends to establish his ideals —among them his belief that in a democracy the individual is more individual the more confident he or she is as an integral part of a community— and his conception of the human soul as never separated from the body and nourished by encounter, personal expression, literature (Navarro n.pag). Images and symbolism are a powerful vehicle for the expression of these views and constitute one of the main challenges that Borges had to face in his translation, which he surely wanted to be a lot more than a servile transcript, according to his own view of this activity as “metáfora de la esencia transformadora de la literatura” (Aparicio 145).



### 5.2.2 Borges's translation of "Song of Myself"

Aparicio claims that "Borges tradujo sus primeros poemas de Walt Whitman alrededor de 1927" (125). According to this author, the translation is fairly literal inasmuch as it tries to maintain the language, the order, and the structure of the original verses (126). By contrast, argues the same author, Spanish previous translations were less accurate (130). This could be seen at odds with Borges's belief in poetry translation as recreation, although as mentioned earlier, he also claimed that Whitman's free verse enabled him to produce a more straightforward rendering.

For Borges, Whitman tried to create an interplay of the multitude of human beings that coexisted in himself (Eloy 191). For this reason, the American poet needed to create a hero who remains the voice of the poem. It was that voice and the extended metaphor that it echoes that Borges had to recreate (see above, p. 7) rather than slavishly transcribe. Aparicio states that "Los textos de Borges demuestran ese equilibrio entre el poeta que contribuye a la traducción con sus propias intuiciones literarias y su particular vocabulario, y el traductor o lector fiel quien trata de mantener el mismo tono y contexto del original" (131). Borges translates by following his own personal vision but sticking to proper use of language and to his own poetic intuitions. Borges remade and rewrote "Song of Myself" to his measure (Eloy 193), including changes in the order of the syntactic elements that were not always required by the need for plain grammatical shifts, but rather by his personal preference with regards to his perception of the rhythm of Spanish (Fernández 217).

With these ideas in mind, let us now discuss some aspects of the Spanish translation of "Song of Myself" by Jorge Luis Borges as reprinted in its 1972 edition by Editorial Lumen *Selección, traducción y prólogo de Jorge Luis Borges*<sup>2</sup>. It is a partial translation in which only some poems appear. According to Fernández, "Borges sigue los criterios de fidelidad distintos, no omite nada de lo que figura en "Song", respeta las estructuras en sus más pequeños detalles, y a pesar de ello, sus variaciones nos ofrecen siempre un resultado loable desde el punto de vista de su expresión castellana." (232).

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<sup>2</sup> According to Moga (46), there is a previous translation to this one from 1969. He published a part of the book for the Editorial Juarez in Buenos Aires. It is a partial translation, introduced by a prologue where he provides a number of reflections on Whitman.

Regarding metaphors and figurative language, Borges tries to maintain the original meaning and structure that Whitman uses while avoiding the obvious, trite lexical choice. This can be seen, for example, in “nature without check with original energy” (20) and “Naturaleza sin freno con elemental energía” (21). These verses try to reinforce the poet’s identification with the forces of nature, which he personifies so that everything else resurfaces through his figure. In the same manner, Whitman also makes many other references to himself such as in “I harbor for good or bad” (20), which Borges translates as “Soy puerto para el bien y para el mal” (21) —a rephrasing which strikes us as even more explicitly metaphorical than what is granted by the original verb. In this sense, Borges performs a transposition, changing the verb “harbor” for the Spanish noun “puerto”: while it may be seen as an otherwise legitimate and ordinary grammatical shift which does not alter the original meaning, it has the additional benefit of preventing the dilution of the ST metaphor into a TT paraphrase (the verb may translate as “albergo” or “amparo”).

Another instance of figurative language whose vehicle Borges maintains in his target text is “become undisguised and naked” (22). In the Spanish version, we find a literal translation: “me quitaré el disfraz y quedaré desnudo” (23), though again, a grammatical shift is involved (a verbal participle, “undisguised,” is converted into a noun, “disfraz”). This second example conveys the idea of sexual and bodily freedom, which is a regular motif throughout a poem that conveys an indictment of a society which rejects naked bodies and freedom in this sense. Moving forward in the poem, in the fifth section, we have another example of a metaphor that provides room for Borges’s recreation structure and controlled freedom. The phrase in question is “loose the stop from your throat” (30). In the English version, the first part of the line includes a verb and a noun phrase. However, the Spanish translation chooses one simple term “desembaraza tu garganta” (31) and thus combines expressive economy and impact in a line that conveys Whitman’s urgent appeal for freedom of speech regardless of what society thinks. Borges’s imperative is none the less effective than Whitman’s. The same kind of economy, and a slight modulation of the metaphor’s vehicle that enhances its concreteness (Cf. Borges’s own taxonomy of metaphors, and the binarism concrete/abstract in page 22 above) can be seen in the Argentinian’s rendering “Agonies are one of my changes of garments” (114) as “las agonías son mis mudas de ropa” (115).

Furthermore, Borges maintains the poetic voice's vocative and intimate engagement with his own self, which is then extended to the reader. An example of this can be seen in the poem's fifth section: "I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you" (28). This is translated by Borges as "Creo en ti, mi alma, el otro que soy no se rebajará ante ti" (29). The speaker establishes a connection with its soul. In this sense, there is a personification of the abstract noun "soul" that continues in the following verses and generates further examples of figurative language: "Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice"(30). Borges translates this line as "Sólo quiero el arrullo, el susurro de tu voz suave" (31). Let it be said in passing that the translator's handling of consonance here provides further evidence of his own poetic skills. Moreover, there are sensual connotations in this trope, since Whitman assigns personal features to this notional concept. The speaker is telling a story in which both parts have a sexual experience.

In general, Whitman tends to personify the "soul" as can also be seen in "I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul" (108). Regarding the translation of this line, Borges is certainly daring and departs from the word-for-word strategy sometimes advocated for particularly bold metaphors: "Mi alma insaciable y fluida emprende su vuelo" (109). In the original version, Whitman emphasizes the focal position of the first person subject, whereas in the translation, the soul image performs the agentive function. The metaphor in this case converts a concrete aspect into an abstract one. There are also omissions of near repetitions "fly"/"flights," which in this case involves the deletion of the alliterative effect. Borges decides to translate this concept only once by using a rhetorical, periphrastic expression: "emprende su vuelo." In view of the above commentary, we venture to say that the Spanish rendering reads a little bit more conventional than Whitman's striking metaphor.

There are many other lines in the original poem where Whitman addresses his audience in the second person, sometimes with scriptural echoes, such as in "You shall possess the good of the earth and sun" (24). In his Spanish translation —"Serás dueño de los bienes de la tierra y del sol" (25) — Borges basically provides a *stricto sensu* translation which goes to show that he is also capable of restraint. The poem is rich in personifications such as "The impassive stones that receive and return so many echoes" (38), which is literally translated as: "Las rocas impasibles que reciben y devuelven tantos ecos" (39), or "Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth" (70) which again Borges

solves economically and pretty literally: “¡Sonríe, tierra voluptuosa de fresco aliento!” (71). Another particularly central metaphor in the poem (Cf. Welty 87) —“Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son” (76) — is equally dealt with by Borges by identically preserving vehicle and word order: “Walt Whitman, un cosmos, de Manhattan el hijo” (77).

Furthermore, in “Know my omnivorous lines and must not write any less” (140), “lines” is likewise transformed into an animated creature. Borges translates it fairly literally, at least as far as the figurative language is concerned: “Sé que mis versos son omnívoros, pero he de seguir escribiéndolos” (141). However, he recasts the negative construction as a positive statement, perhaps introducing a slight change in the statement’s modality. Another interesting example is “The clear light plays on the brown gray and green intertinged” (40), here rendered as “La clara luz juega sobre los vaivenes del verde, del pardo y del gris” (41). Borges chooses to change the word order and resorts to a nominalization (“green intertinged” becomes “vaivenes del verde”), whereas the single concept “brown gray” becomes the dyad “del pardo y del gris.” We may perhaps argue that in dealing with such visual images, Borges resorts to a freer, more personal style of translation, even though his freedom remains controlled.

Whitman’s poetic idioms also rely on similes, and accordingly Borges’s version contains a number of explicit comparisons. An example of this is “Sure as the most certain sure, plumb in the uprights” (24) and “Seguros como la certidumbre más firme, seguros y afianzados” (25). In this example, there are interesting inventions, particularly in the translation of the second part of the line, for what is not a particularly diaphanous phrasing. “Plumb” is translated by the couplet “seguros y afianzados”, whereas “in the uprights” is omitted in the translated text. Another instance that also involves a comparison is “Stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty, electrical” (26) translated, this time quite literally and with exactly the same amount of lexical originality, as “Fuertes como un caballo, afectuosos, soberbios, eléctricos” (27), a strategy otherwise maintained in many instances of tropes where the explicit words of comparison are omitted: for example, “Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation. Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic” (32) becomes “O sospecho que la hierba misma es un niño, el recién nacido de la tierra. O un jeroglífico uniforme” (33). Borges retains the same structure, but avoids the repetition: a common (sometimes challenged) instinct in ENGL>ESP translation, even in the case of literary texts whose



TL renderings sometimes exhibit “a tendency not to transfer original repetitions —not out of carelessness nor out of linguistic constraints, but out of normative stylistic considerations, on the assumption that repetitions are not ‘elegant’ and reflect a poor vocabulary” (Ben-Ari 11).

Borges is also sensitive to Whitman’s intertextual echoes within the poem. Let us remember that Whitman’s metaphors do not constitute isolated instances but extended, allegorical images and personifications that sustain the whole composition. A central metaphor in the poem used to pantheistically encompass the whole of humankind is “And of these one and all I weave the song of myself” (58). Borges maintains the same structure in his rendering “Y en todos y en cada uno voy tejiendo el canto a mí mismo” (59). This is also a reference to the title of the poem, which is an inclusive metaphor that embraces all readers. The only difference between both versions is that in the English text, the verb is in the present simple tense, while in the Spanish version, it is in the present continuous tense, which may perhaps introduce time-related connotations (Borges’s version seems to highlight the continuity and duration of the song itself).

Borges, therefore, appears to deal with figurative language in “Song of Myself” in a way that is varied and flexible in terms of the procedures employed, and adapted to each situation. Even so, there is a consistent accuracy, a remarkable poetic skill in handling both the concrete and the spiritual and an insightful perception of the kind of striking contrasts that characterize Whitman’s figurative language. As Aparicio claims, “Es una traducción de equivalencias poéticas, en la cual el lenguaje whitmanesco se mantiene en el español” (131). However, Borges does not abandon his own way of writing. He introduces a number of resourceful variations according to his own poetic style, which allows the translation to be read as an autonomous and independent text.



## 5.3 EDUARDO MOGA

### 5.3.1 Literary and poetic background

Eduardo Moga (1962) is mostly known for his work as a translator of numerous works (including Frank O'Hara, Carl Sandburg, Charles Bukowski, Richard Aldington, William Faulkner and Walt Whitman, among others), but he is also an editor, a literary critic and a poet. In several interviews published in the printed and online media, as well as in his blog *Corónicas de España* (<http://eduardomoga1.blogspot.com/>), he has discussed his method of writing and translating, his poetic views and his literary concerns. In an interview for the poetry section of *El Nacional*, he suggests that a good translator must devote himself wholly to the text. He likewise insists on the critical importance for translators to gain a thorough understanding of the text in order to prevent unwarranted interpretations while at the same time creating a “persuasive” text for the TL audience: one that convinces readers that they are in front of a translation governed by a standard of fidelity to the original work (9).

In the same interview Moga elaborates on his view of poetry translation. He points out the need to translate poetry even though part of the original meaning, and of the poetic value of the text, may be lost during the translation process. For him everything in the poetic text, even the slightest detail like a punctuation mark, is meaningful and demands minute attention. Quoting Octavio Paz, he sums up his rationale for poetry translation: the translator has to identify the poet's goals and achieve the same effects in the TL insofar as it is possible. In his own words, “intento ver qué emoción, qué vibración, qué ánimo, qué idea intentaba comunicar el escritor y yo intento comunicar la misma...ese es un poco el norte por el que me oriento” (Moga *El Nacional* 9).

In *Vallejo & Co*, an electronic journal of Art and Literature, Moga refers to his own conception of poetry and his literary influences (n.pag). For him composing poetry involves trying to re-learn to write with every new book of verse and creating open and contradictory structures —a statement that fitfully applies to Whitman's poetics. Among his early influences he mentions Neruda and French symbolism. Later, he paid special attention to French and Latin American poetry. Other writers whose influence Moga acknowledges are Miguel de Cervantes, Pablo Neruda, San Juan de la Cruz, Marcel Proust, Octavio Paz and Walt Whitman. In yet another interview for the literary journal

*Revista Quimera*, he expresses his admiration for Juan Ramón Jiménez, whom he believes to be the most important poet of the twentieth century in Spain (n.pag.)



### 5.3.2 Moga's translation of "Song of Myself"

Among Moga's rich body of published literary translations, his version of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is outstanding. Moga chose to translate the 1892 edition because it was authorized by Whitman shortly before dying. In *Estación Poesía*, Calbarro claims that "estamos ante la nueva traducción de referencia de Hojas de Hierba" (68). This complete translation published by Galaxia Gutenberg in 2015 includes an introduction in which Moga discusses Whitman's work and life and his contribution to English-language literature, as well as providing relevant information about his critical reception and impact on Hispanic literature. As mentioned earlier in this project, he ends this introduction with a chronological discussion of previous Spanish translations of *Leaves of Grass*. In the quarterly journal *Estación poesía*, Juan Luis Calbarro (another Spanish poet) argues that all of them are inaccurate (68). Moga opts for the *Leaves of Grass* edition from 1892 because it was authorized by Whitman shortly before dying. In *Estación Poesía*, Calbarro argues "estamos ante la nueva traducción de referencia de *Hojas de hierba*" (68). The second part of Moga's edition consists of the "Inscriptions" and poems. Two annexes complete the volume which contains all the poems that appear in Whitman's original final edition. Moga adds a final section where he discusses Whitman's prose and explains the circumstances and historical events that influenced his writing. Likewise, he includes the translation of the prologues corresponding to each of the editions of *Leaves of Grass*.

The translator's own views about his rendering of *Leaves of Grass* are collected in an interview published in *Revista de Letras*, an online literature journal. There he points out the importance of Whitman's work and the appeal of his poetic idiom: one that invites the audience to continue reading and penetrating into the heart of the poems. Moga, who admits that he approached the task with utter respect, acknowledges that he took the previous Spanish translations as a reference. In his opinion, the best of all these versions is the one by Borges, even though it only contains "Song of Myself" and a selection of poems (n.pag.) Concerning the main difficulties encountered in performing his job, Moga notes that Whitman is not easy to translate because of his colloquialisms, archaisms, and neologisms. Additional hurdles are the poems' powerful rhythm and imagery.

Broadly speaking, Moga's translation is extremely neat and restrained and often operates on literal principles. Literal enough, for example is his rendering of "the atmosphere is not a perfume (...) I am in love with it" (166) —one of Whitman's recurrent personifications of abstract concepts— as "la atmósfera no es un aroma (...) estoy enamorado de ella" (167). And nearly word-for-word, yet none-the-less accomplished, is the translation of "Corpses rise, gashes heal, fastening roll from me" (270) as "los muertos se levantan, las heridas sanan, las ligaduras se deshacen" (271). Otherwise, it is not difficult to illustrate specific translations of metaphorical language in *Leaves of Grass* that involve regular transpositions (nominalizations), for example: "The Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect terms" (294)/ "Allí estará el Señor, esperando mi llegada, en perfectas condiciones" (295). Sometimes, Moga's interventions are minimal but give away his close attention to detail, like in the following segment where the poet directly addresses Death and where punctuation is slightly altered in tune with the translator's views on the rendering of poetry expressed in one of the interviews cited above (34): "And as to you Death, and you bitter hug of mortality, it is idle to try to alarm me" (304)/ "y en cuanto a ti, Muerte, y a ti, amargo abrazo de la mortalidad, es inútil que intentéis asustarme" (305).

It is interesting, at this point, to focus once again on one of the poem's complex images that caused Borges to engage in a drastic rewording of the line (see above, p. 27). "I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul" (250). This is an important image from the point of view of the poem's spiritual proposal, since as Welty states, "Whitman employs a variation on this theme by endowing the persona's soul with the ability to transmigrate temporarily into the body of others, and thus to attain complete empathic identification with those others" (26). Moga's rendering, while also involving some compression and the loss of the alliterative effect, is considerably more literal (yet not necessarily less effective) than Borges's: "mis vuelos son los de un alma fluida y voraz" (251).

Moga's extreme respect for the original words —those words that "itch at your ears till you understand them" (300) — does not make his translation slavish, and he often resorts to modulation. According to Vinay and Darbelnet, this is "a variation through a change of viewpoint, of perspective (eclairage) and very often of category of thought" (qtd. in Newmark *A textbook* 88). For example, "For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (164) is translated by Moga as "porque no hay átomo en mí

que no te pertenezca” (165), thus negating the opposite of what is stated in the original version possibly in order to “be faithful to the intention of the author and the genius of the language” (Vinay & Darbelnet, qtd. in Pym 140). Another modulation takes place when Moga translates “Agonies are one of my changes of garments” (256) as “el sufrimiento es una de mis mudas” (257), a wording partly similar to Borges’s yet involving an even greater reduction. Other than this, Eduardo Moga’s thorough version does not particularly engage in free-reined recreation. Even so, there are occasional instances of a freer approach like for example in “I stand and look at them long and long” (238)/ “no me canso de mirarlos” (239). This kind of translation “reproduces the matter without the manner, or the content without the form of the original” (Newmark *A textbook* 46).

Before closing this discussion of selected instances of figurative language in Moga’s translation, it is worth mentioning that Moga agrees with Borges in the translation of many verses. Leaving aside such cases where there is little or no room for motivated variation (e.g., “I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul” (212)/ “soy el poeta del Cuerpo y soy el poeta del Alma” (213))—the typically Whitmanesque statement that a union “of those dualities is necessary for the persona to achieve inner peace” (Welty 28)—, the original metaphor “loose the stop from your throat” (174) provides an interesting example, since Moga’s Spanish translation is curiously identical to Borges’s —“desembaraza tu garganta” (175)— and rather reads like a mere sanctioning of the Argentinian’s. In any case, it strikes us as a semantic translation that preserves and even enhances the aesthetic value of the verse: a translation that “is more flexible, admits the creative exception to 100% fidelity and allows for the translator’s intuitive empathy with the original” (Newmark *A Textbook* 46), which in turn shows that Moga’s high fidelity standard admits of some exceptions.

On the other hand, Moga translates some verses differently from Borges. For example, for “I harbor for good or bad” (166), Moga opts for “acojo el bien y el mal” (167). In this regard, while conducting our analysis of Borges’s version, we positively valued Borges’s verb>noun transposition as not simply legitimate and faithful enough, but also more impactful in figurative terms than preserving the original first person noun (see above, p.26). Strategically relevant, on the other hand, are their differences with regard to the translation of the line “And of these one and all I weave the song of myself” (202), which echoes the poem’s title and is rendered by Moga as “y con todos y



cada uno voy tejiendo el canto de mí mismo” (203). Borges, by contrast, favors the wording “canto a mi mismo”, while Moga chooses “canto de mí mismo”. While involving only a one-letter difference, this variation may have consequences in the sense that Borges’s preposition perhaps foregrounds the celebratory nature of the “Song”.

To conclude, Eduardo Moga’s translation of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* shows a feeling for metaphor (no doubt enriched by his own experience as a poet) and a meticulous respect for their original wording which does not lead to stiff or unnatural renderings nor precludes his verbal creativity. To these merits, one must add the completeness of his edition and his input as editor and scholar. Whitman’s new conception of democratic love that requires a new attitude towards the body and sexuality (Navarro n.pag) is competently carried through in this 21<sup>st</sup> century translation, which, however, and according to Moga himself, will someday become outdated:

“Traducir es fracasar, incluso cuando tu fracaso no es demasiado clamoroso, (...) esa traducción está condenada a caducar, es decir, al cabo del tiempo esa lengua evoluciona, las lenguas evolucionan y necesariamente esa traducción, como los organismos vivos, declinará, envejecerá y morirá” (Moga *El Nacional* 9)



## 6. CONCLUSION

The importance of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in the American literary canon is unquestionable and its contribution can be assessed in terms of its huge influence on later writers and poets —and not only, thanks to translation, in English-speaking national literatures. Since its original publication, the poem's multiplicity of perspectives and meanings has been updated and adjusted by generations of readers.

Translators play a very special role in that process of continuous remaking that did not cease after the long series of successive editions of *Leaves of Grass* that Whitman published. This work has been translated by a large number of people, some of them (as in the case of Jorge Luis Borges and Eduardo Moga, whose respective rewritings we have examined in this graduation project particularly in connection with their use of figurative language), poets in their own right. The plurality of metaphor types that are present in Whitman's work (indeed Borges's typology discussed above can be exemplified in the pages of *Leaves of Grass*) makes translation a demanding task.

Although Borges's work is impressive in many ways and is generally faithful to the original work, he tends to recreate. In doing so, he inevitably adapts the translation to his literary style and taste and produced a creative rendering. In this sense, his approach strikes us as somewhat freer than Moga's. This means that his translation can be read as an autonomous and independent text. Likewise, Borges's nuanced rephrasing of "Song of Myself" encourage rich interpretations: new shades of meaning that surely served as a basis for later translations that take his as a model.

On the other hand, Moga is a more literal translator. He is a very competent interpreter capable of great accuracy in dealing with figurative language. This does not prevent him from being resourceful and exhibiting some degree of controlled freedom. There is no doubt that his experience as a poet has enriched his translation, while his record as a literary critic and editor shows in the thoroughness and tidiness of his edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

As for the starting hypotheses, it has been confirmed that Moga is faithful to the original work and particularly meticulous when it comes to avoiding unsupported deviations from the original version. As for Borges, while his translation is faithful

enough, it also exemplifies to some extent his tendency towards recreation and exhibits traits of his own poetic style and early fascination with metaphor, which in turn goes back to his Ultraist years.



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