

An Interview with Suzanne Jill Levine

By María Constanza Guzmán

October 1, 2009

María Constanza Guzmán: In the introduction to *The Subversive Scribe*, you mention the usefulness of “self-referential inquisitions by prose translators” as models for the study of translation and for “self-questioning for all interpreters” (xiii). *The Subversive Scribe* is your translator’s statement. What did you want to accomplish when you first wrote this book? How do you see the book now? If you wrote it now, what would you change or add? Would you write another statement? What image of the translator do you relate to?

Suzanne Jill Levine: I gave a lecture in Spain a few years ago about the translator as a nostalgic figure. I would say that is the image as I feel it now, though I had first thought of the translator as language adventurer or experimental writer. This nostalgic figure came to me after reading about Henri Langlois, who started Cinémathèque Française in Paris. He spoke about how the film buff is a nostalgic person, who lives with a sense of loss or exile, of childhood’s lost paradise, of the past as another country, to quote Hartley. I think this is true of me. When I began to write the book, I was responding among other things to a comment by one of the first writers I translated, Cabrera Infante, that I had “too much ego” to be a translator—he said this, in part, because he was an egocentric author who wanted to control the text from cover to cover and in all its translations. I wrote the book mainly, however, because I felt translating involved a rich thought process of which the reader of the finished translation would never be aware. What a loss to readers, and how unfair to the translator, that readers are not aware of what we experience, of how complex the process is and how it reveals the literary critic and scholar in the good translator. In other words, instead of writing an essay or a book, you are translating. You are using those other capacities plus the intuitive capacity of an artist. The gifted translator is a poet, a maker. Even in the Borgesian sense of a maker who, by rereading, is creating. So, that’s why I started writing

notes on the margins of my translations early on. Obviously I was interested in discussing the writers themselves which made how I did the translations an important area to explore. My early translations were very special, besides, because of my collaboration with the authors. And so I published my first translation articles in the seventies, and these were the starting point of this book. The book didn't come out until 1991 but really it began in 1971, a long time ago. What convinced me to write the book was the resistance I encountered in the academic world to the professor who translates. I found that ridiculous particularly in the cases of great translators (not all cooks are chefs after all). So I wanted to make a political statement, to protest this lack of understanding of translations as part of a scholar's production. Obviously it had to do with my career in academe, but I believe I struck a note with others going through similar struggles. I wanted to show how the academy had to change its thinking regarding translation, and I was going to help make that happen. So there you have why I wrote the book, both a personal and collective reason. But aside from any reasons it was also the impulse to write. I am a writer and I thought I should write about something I knew about. And then there is yet another reason. Here I was, receiving this incredible correspondence from these brilliant writers, those aperçus, not to mention the information that they gave me was unique. There were so many reasons to write the book. So much had to be uncovered and, as it were, proclaimed.

MCG: Was it a difficult book to write?

SJL: It was a very difficult book to write because you can write a whole book to describe how you translate one poem and why. How could I possibly talk about the numerous complexities involved in translating twenty challenging novels? This morning I was reading a book called *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film*, by Joy Gould Boyum, which came out a couple of decades ago. I had never heard about the book but I found it on a friend's bookshelf. I was looking at the way the author had categorized the films; she was dealing with numerous movies, a lot of important ones, the history of film almost. She did something similar to what I had done, a quasi-Cartesian device, one of many ways of approaching such a project. She divided the book into problems. That is what I did in *The Subversive Scribe*. Traditionally people are always saying, translation is impossible, translation is a problem; it is *the* problem. What is the problem? The problem is puns, the problem

is colloquialisms and spoken language: people think such usages are impossible to translate. So I decided, well, I will look at some of these principal areas of translating fiction, those “impossibilities.” I also wanted to organize it in a way that was an arc, a crescendo, like storytelling. I went from what people think are the impossibilities of translation to the concept of why people think that way and what are the elements that make it impossible. If you can’t translate puns, you can’t translate the spoken, and ultimately, as I show, you can’t translate words then, for they are never the same. The “literalist” prejudice with some sort of impossible fidelity is absurd. This word is not that word, period. Words are never the same. You don’t translate a text but rather a context, as a wise friend once put it, and words are always shifting according to their usage.

MCG: Let’s talk about your authors. You have translated Latin American fiction by writers who were mostly living authors. Collaboration was very important in the process. Your work with Cabrera Infante is the most noteworthy example. This kind of relationship led to some lifelong friendships. What was the nature of that collaboration? How has it been with other authors? Has there been anything in common among these experiences? What did you expect of that author- translator relationship? What were the mutual expectations?

SJL: I translated a chapter from the memoirs of one writer from the distant past, Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, the figure who Arenas based his book on—that was a lot of fun. He was the one dead author, I suppose, though I have also done bits and pieces of twentieth-century Latin American writers who were not alive when I translated their work, such as Felisberto Hernández. But yes, I have translated mainly living authors. Thinking of this question, just now, I thought of something that I hadn’t thought about explicitly. My work with Cabrera Infante, which was the first, actually made other writers I translated want to follow the act. So it was not only I who felt more free about consulting them, working with them, but they said, look what she and Cabrera Infante did together, look at that translation, I want to do that with her too.

MCG: You became sought-after . . .

SJL: Yes, that was interesting—there are some funny stories, as when Manuel Puig wrote me a letter from Buenos Aires in 1971 telling me that he had just been at a

party at the house of a writer where all the writers in the room wanted to be translated by me. There were certainly commonalities between Manuel Puig and Cabrera Infante. Their English was amazing because they were both avid moviegoers and fans of American movies since childhood. They both had an extraordinary vocabulary in English for non-native speakers even though their accents were quite apparent. We must remember that Cuba was practically a U.S. colony before it became a Russian colony; English was a second language; and Argentina was in some sectors Anglo-Argentina after all. English is an important element in both those cultures for various political, social, economic and historical reasons. While Manuel and Guillermo spoke English gorgeously, they didn't necessarily write it as well. That is, knowing the grammar of a language perfectly is not easy; there are so many levels of knowledge of a language; Borges commented once that the last thing you get right learning English, for example, are the prepositions. Both Puig and Cabrera Infante wrote in English but their written English was not like their written Spanish. So working with them was interesting from that perspective, their level of English and the fact that they were so brilliant. But it was mostly those two cases. With Sarduy the collaboration was much more conventional. His English seemed to be from India, where he frequently traveled—indeed he had a Hindu accent. With him and the other writers I translated, there was a more “normal” consultation relationship: I would query them about the meaning of a word or sometimes ask them what they thought of a solution I suggested; once in a while they would give me ideas. With Bioy Casares, with whom I worked on several books, I would send him the manuscripts and he would make comments here and there, but not engage in a lot of rewriting. With him and with the others I would say it was more limited to the regular consultation, as other translators do.

MCG: What were the mutual expectations? What do you make of those connections you had with the writers in light of a postmodern reading of the author?

SJL: Alastair Reid once said that the ideal translation would be face to face, in a way, because then two or even more people bring in their perspectives on a particular text, or word, or sentence, or phrase, and it helps to have all these different points of view, because in a sense every translation is different, each

person definitely does a different translation of the same text. It is more or less like the idea of the mobile event and the immobile fact: an original is always there as the translator's starting point, even though that is a convention of sorts, but each translation radiates from it. This idea is interesting, and if you have a team working on a translation there is something Pierre Menardian about it. However, a translation is an interpretation and therefore it is a writer's interpretation of another writer. Ultimately it comes down to that; we have to see a translation as a reading, each translation is a single reading no matter how many people are involved.

MCG: Let's talk about the authors' perceptions about translation. From your conversations with them and from reading (about) their work, what would you say is their idea about translation and translators? How did translation appear in their writings? How did they perceive their work in translation and you as their translator? What image of the translator did they have?

SJL: Firstly, every writer wanted to be translated into English because they would have a larger market for their work. Now many writers write directly in English to avoid the modest translation costs—a branch of U.S. Latino lit perhaps? The goal is to be in the mainstream market, now more than ever. So for each of these Latin American writers and many others it was their dream to get into English. Since many of them were polyglots, Cortázar, Fuentes, as well as the ones I already mentioned, they knew English, they were sophisticated readers, so they definitely had informed opinions about translations. García Márquez said he liked Gregory Rabassa's translation more than his own Spanish original. That would be typical of their kind of comments, either that or they would say, I don't want to work with that translator, I want to work with you because you would make it better. I had one very curious project which was a real killer, it ended up with a crazy title, *Triple Cross*, but it was three short novels, novellas, by Carlos Fuentes, José Donoso, and Severo Sarduy. Carlos Fuentes was very generous in his promotion of writers who he believed deserved to be known. He helped García Márquez, Donoso, as a sort of patron of the boom, as Emir Rodríguez Monegal was, both as a critic and editor of *Mundo Nuevo*, promoting the writers, helping them gain recognition. So Carlos Fuentes with his agent, Carl Brandt, came up with this idea, he had written this little novel called *Zona Sagrada*, Holy Place, which was a very strange little novel

about the relationship between Maria Felix and her son, who was gay. So he thought, let's put Donoso in there with his gay novella *El lugar sin límites*. And they thought of including Sarduy, one of his novellas. They ended up getting the three novellas in and Carlos wanted to call it "the Baudyville Trio." It was very funny notion, this trio of fictions about transvestites and homosexuality, because Donoso said to me, but Jill, how could you, such a young girl, translate such perverse literature. I was twenty-four at the time and I looked about fourteen, I was very young-looking for my age. I told him: "Well, it seems like fun to me, I don't know, I'm fine with it." It was a rather curious project, but it was interesting how it was generated by one writer to help others and also to get his minor novel published. These minor yet very interesting novellas. It wasn't a very successful project but, interestingly enough, each one of the novels has been reissued time and time again, so it was really important that they were initially published. But the book itself is weird as an anthology. In any case, that is just one story about how the world of translation works. And so this is why, when I had just translated *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth*, which was a big success—it had received a lot of attention, miraculously, because it is such a difficult book—Manuel told me that all his friends down in Argentina were saying that they wanted "to be translated by Jill." He wrote in that same letter: "Bioy Casares, Silvina Ocampo, and a bunch of other people are dreaming of being translated by you." I was Bioy's dream, just think!

MCG: How does the question of gender manifest itself in your work? How do you see your woman translator's voice in your work, in your choices—linguistic, stylistic—in your authors? And how do you see it in relation to contemporary Latin American literature?

SJL: First of all, I translated mostly men because the most important Latin American writers traditionally were men, the ones who principally have been promoted. But as I explain in my book, those I translated were actually rather marginal. Two of them were gay, and the other one, Cabrera Infante, in many ways is also marginal. He wrote a brilliant book, arguably the book that most reflects the Cuba of a certain era, *Tres tristes tigres*, one of the most wonderful Cuban novels and one that most Cubans love. *Tres tristes tigres* recalls that moment of history, that city culture of Havana as nobody has done it. He set a trend vis-à-vis the

bilingual novel, local/street slang, that many younger writers from the Caribbean as well as Latino/a, Chicano/a and others, have followed. . . . But basically I translated mostly Latin American writers who were kind of marginal, so there is already an irony there. But my translation projects have been very varied, very different. I have translated several many women writers as well, Cecilia Vicuña, Silvina Ocampo, Alejandra Pizarnik, among others. That identification of me as translating only men is inaccurate, though certainly the main books I've done have been written by men. Unusual authors, most of them. It's sort of interesting to look at the books—much fewer than in the past—I've translated in recent years, such as the last writings of Sarduy. In a way now I am either translating people I miss—a sentimentally motivated homage to the dead perhaps—or returning to the greats I still believe in, as in the case of Borges. One of the reasons why I wanted to work with Carol Maier on Sarduy was because of a shared grief about his death. His final texts were so much about his terrible struggle with AIDS, and how he kept up his humor, his wit, his art despite all that he was suffering. So you want to share that because it is such a sad thing to confront. Translating it together made it more joyous, helped me to focus in on the playful text itself. In a way working with Carol was a feminist act: working together each had to accept compromises, in a collaborative effort.

MCG: In *The Subversive Scribe* you say that *Three Trapped Tigers* is a 1971 New York translation. You situate it in a place and time. Do you think it is necessary to retranslate literary works? Can you think of this question both from a reader and from a translator's perspective?

SJL: Well, I think retranslations definitely happen every century and often every decade. I just don't know what the next century is going to be like, and what will be literature fifty years from now. In terms of retranslation, I suppose poetry can and should be retranslated constantly, as well as classics like Dante and Cervantes; I am not too sure they need all the retranslations they undergo. Of all these writers I think Borges is the one who deserves retranslation the most. There are also market questions, as well as the initiatives of writers who feel that they have a relationship with a text and want to do something with it. But in terms of the validity of my translations, I think that they work pretty well, partly because they were being written around the time the original books were written. There are exceptions, like

some of Bioy's works, which were written in the forties and my translation is from the seventies or eighties. That is already another era. In the case of *Three Trapped Tigers*, when I said it was from New York in the seventies, I was stressing that there is no doubt that some of the solutions we came up with were from what was happening just then. I think what made my translations of *Three Trapped Tigers* and *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* good translations is that I was still fairly close to my childhood. There were a lot of things in the language that were sort of infantile. So to remember childhood language was actually an important factor. Also, the fact that, as I say in my book, I had much older siblings and felt close to a previous generation, gave me a broader range in terms of language. My language reflected the present and the recent past, which I think it has to do. But no translation is perfect. There is the phrase, for example, that translations are like "stewed strawberries." But I certainly think that no written text is ever totally finished, so at one point you need to publish it. That's what Borges said, if he didn't publish his writing he would always be rewriting. And actually he always was rewriting. I feel that if I were to take hold of any of my translations there is no doubt that I would be looking at details and thinking, oh dear, I could do this instead of that. You never totally finish.

MCG: Can you tell me about your process and how it has changed through the years?

SJL: For the first ten books I translated I used an Olivetti portable. I went through several drafts. I would try to go through the first draft very quickly—I think many translators will say that, because you are not going to solve all of the problems—and I would always leave a lot of space, I would triple-space it. Then I would do a second draft where I inserted a lot of solutions, but still pretty rough. Then I would go through that draft and I would have questions to ask the writer. After getting their answers and ideas I would come up with the third and final draft in which there were some minor edits for the end. I worked like that with Manuel and it was a very slow and time-consuming process with the typewriter. I began to use the computer in the mid-eighties, and that changed the process a lot, especially because you can rework and rework, it gives you a lot more freedom to rework. I think the computer is an ideal instrument for translation and for writing.

MCG: North American translators are subject to what Lawrence Venuti has called the “canon of fluency,” i.e., to certain standards and norms of English writing. do you negotiate market demands, translation demands, and publishing demands, in the English in which you render your works, how do you deal with questions of readability and smoothness? What would or wouldn’t you compromise?

SJL: That is a complex matter. With all my books, including the biography *Manuel Puig and the Spider Woman*, and in general with any book that anybody writes, there is someone who mediates between you and the reader, and that’s the editor. Depending on the editor’s culture and the culture of the publishing house itself many things can happen. I have worked with publishers accustomed to dealing with experimental fiction, but nonetheless sometimes they had questions or they wanted to use a solution for something that seemed to me like a conventional compromise. It was a back and forth. And you accept some compromises and not others, but you definitely want to get the book out there. One of the most interesting experiences I had in that regard was when I worked with Simon and Schuster, a big commercial house. I was doing the last novel of Puig’s. My editor at that time said to me, “there is a problem because we don’t know who is talking.” I explained that this was part of the style, but she said “Well, can’t we put names?” I said: “Definitely not,” and there was a huge battle, but I won. Because part of the point is that in the novel Puig is using film script format but without the names. It is very important how he plays with that, and it is up to the reader to find out who the speakers are. In a way you are what you speak. So that was the story, and I thought it was rather interesting; it was quite invasive of the editor; I had never encountered that before. Then again, the book wasn’t exactly a runaway bestseller either. I think that sometimes I’ve really taken control of the text and sometimes the editor might have been right. For example, in *The Buenos Aires Affair*, there was a certain amount of comma splicing, it was a device of stream of consciousness. Nonetheless, I could see where a reader might be turned off by that in English. Ronald Christ pointed it out. And I said, “Well, it’s Puig.” Yes, he said, but you translate the punctuation. And he was right. Punctuation must be translated like everything else, every language has its rules and conventions. Larry says, yes, but why don’t you bring their conventions into my, your language. Well, this is a matter of negotiation. If you read his translations, they are very fluent. Theory is

one thing and practice is another, in Larry's case as well as others': the practice of writing is an act of constant negotiation and no one theory has the final word. I would say that my translations, because the writers themselves wanted to be received in this culture, are definitely mindful of the reader. But I am not too sure that fluency would be the best or the most precise word to describe that. You think of the reader and of the writing. In Puig, for example, the issue of a very subtle form of parody is crucial. If the reader doesn't see the humor and the ironic statements implied, what is the reader getting out of it? Parody presupposes a shared sensibility or code. In the translation you have to somehow make it clear that there is, as I suggested, a source beneath the source, you have to highlight somehow the object of the commentary the text is making. The original readers of Puig recognized viscerally his citations of the words of a bolero, of a tango; they knew the song, they heard the music when they saw the words. What does my reader do? You've got to figure that out.

MCG: Jean Franco speaks incisively of the fact that in the cold war years "nothing was outside the conflict," neither artistic values nor literary criticism. Your article in the *Cambridge Companion to the Latin American Novel* is somewhat of a critical chronology of translation of Latin American literature into English. Could you speak about your experience as a translator more generally, in relation to the institutions and structures have supported your work or make it difficult, either directly or indirectly? If you were in a dissident position, what was that like?

SJL: I'll give you an example. I had a project early on which since then I think many people have done in different ways. I wanted to do an anthology of writers from the Rio de la Plata, from Argentina and Uruguay. It is very difficult to do anthologies of short stories; publishers have always been very resistant; some writers are as well. Another example: I think Onetti is an amazing writer; however, he has had very little success and I don't think anybody would be interested in translating him now. But he was an important writer and I loved his work. There are of course women writers who have been completely neglected, like the Chilean realist Marta Brunet, why hasn't she been translated? These kinds of projects have always been hard to mobilize. At one point I was very enterprising about it, all my focus was on mobilizing translation projects, I was trying to get a lot of unknown writers be translated and I was having a hard time, as an independent translator

without any financial backing for these efforts to promote worthy unknown writers. Since then my energies have needed to be directed in toward other things like paying a mortgage. In regards to the Cold War, I guess I wasn't as aware of it then as I have been in the last twenty years. But I would respond that there are some cultural studies critics who say, well, the boom would not have existed without this or that. They are looking at one aspect in a more complex picture. I believe that the writers who were translated and became famous, like Vargas Llosa, García Márquez, Cortázar, Fuentes, to name the big ones, really did hit on some sort of universal core, like Salman Rushdie, like Milan Kundera, like Virginia Woolf, each in his/her time. They hit on something. Why did they get read and translated? I think in part it was because of that. Look at Borges, he started writing in the early twenties and people didn't know about him until 1960. I think that the history of literature is a very complex story, and politics is an important part of it, but so are other things. It is interesting to see how at one point the publishers were trying to promote writers that had universal messages that therefore would cross boundaries, that would make the national less important and the brotherhood of mankind, so to speak, more important. You look at *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and that is the story of all families, the story of all countries, the story of all nations. The story is Latin American but people can identify with it all over the place. In terms of the writers I translated, I think that they were much more difficult to market, most of them. I think that I purposely went for writing I found marginal and difficult, because I thought, these readers need to expand their horizons. In my time I thought of myself as quite revolutionary. Some may say nowadays, she's not a feminist, she's not subversive, she's actually pretty mainstream: it's interesting to me to see what people say nowadays, how things change, but at the time it seemed revolutionary. In any case I'm just one cog in that wheel, I have my point of view but obviously it is limited. What's important is that you keep learning things and seeing them from another perspective. I do feel that I, like other translators, played an important role in serving writers, helping them get known, and that certainly feels good.

MCG: After so many years of work, how do you see your past translation choices? How do you pick your translation projects? What counts for you as a translator?

SJL: Puig still stands out to me as a writer who did something that was really

important and revolutionary, for example. I still believe in what he did, in regard to gender, that was really important, and important to me personally. Also, very soon I was drawn to Pizarnik, I thought her prose poems were so powerful. And knowing that she was a lesbian, from a Jewish background, that she was marginal, that she had struggled intensely, I thought it was very important to make her known. But most importantly, I was at the time in love with her writing and wanted to somehow make that writing into my own language, I wanted to hear it in my English. So, to this day, the main reason that brings me to any book is that I want to possess in some way the writing. The best translations I did or the most important ones were translations of writing I could be enthusiastic about. That's why I started teaching, because since I didn't just want to translate everything I realized that I was never going to make a living as a translator. To make a living as a translator you have to translate eight hours a day and you have to translate everything they send you. Many things got sent to me and I just said, "I don't like it." Sometimes they even became really popular books. For example, I didn't translate Laura Esquivel although I think she is a fine person and it's a lot of fun, I didn't translate *Like Water for Chocolate* because I thought, to me it won't be interesting as a literary act, I won't enjoy doing this in particular. This was also the case with even more famous writers I won't mention; they sent me books and I said, well I liked that book he did but I don't like this one. And to be honest, a couple of books that I did translate by famous writers I wasn't that crazy about because I didn't think the writing was strong. On the other hand, I have translated lesser known or more recent works. Just recently, at the Guadalajara book fair I met a couple through a mutual friend. The man, poet Gabriel Magaña, gave me a book of his, a little book, and I really liked it, so I just sat down and started translating him. Nobody knows him. One of his books got translated because he has a friend in France. And now Words without Borders has published some of my poems. But I just did it for the fun of it. The point is to do what gives you pleasure: aesthetics is always a very important factor for me as a translator. You fall in love with a text because of its effect on you.

MCG: Speaking as someone who has spent much of her career as a translator and who has also trained translators, in your opinion what should scholarly work in translation look like? What kind of conversation do you think it would be fruitful

for translators to have? What vision do you have for translation as a field? Also, is there a particular theory or approach to language and translation with which you identify?

SJL: To me writing can ideally be aware of its own ideological limitations, and whatever work can bring out the uniqueness of a particular translator's voice or writer's voice, is what is valid in literary criticism in general, and therefore in translation criticism. I don't distinguish translation criticism from literary criticism because I think it is part of literary criticism. I get concerned when I see people imposing theories or ideologies on texts, when instead of departing from the text they depart from an ideology. I think that ideology is always present in all texts and in all readings. If you are not conscious of your own ideological limitations you are bound to make serious errors. (I joke a lot, for example, but in those jokes is a serious realization, usually about me sensing my limitations.) I saw such blindness recently in a young Canadian's comments. I won't mention her name, but she seemed to misunderstand completely what my book *The Subversive Scribe* was about (a misreading of my Woody Allenish humor, really) and what my process as a translator was about because she was blinded by certain rigid parameters of feminism and other theories; she seemed unaware of being imprisoned in a particular theoretical framework which she barely seemed to understand. I think there has to be an awareness that each text has its own rules and (as Borges would put it) "morphology" and you have to come from inside the text as well as your ideology or beliefs. If you can't do that well you are not doing justice to the text, to writing, to literature, to culture. I would say that the more people experience the process, the more sensitive they might be as interpreters. In terms of what theories I think are interesting, anything Borges had to say about literature is so right on because of his perpetual sense of paradox. Perhaps he was not the nicest person, I am sure, and perhaps blind not only literally when it came to contemporary politics. When he was younger he was very interesting and radical, politically, but when he became blind he became isolated from the world and made statements that were totally off, which is unfortunate. But I think that his perspective on literature has taught us so many things that I would say that theoretically he is the most acute. People may think that is not practical but I think that students actually learn so much when they really examine what he says. Of

course, you have to guide them into his texts. For instance, I think that “Pierre Menard” is a revelation, “The Homeric Versions” is a revelation, “The Translation of the Thousand and One Nights” is fascinating, especially now when we talk about Orientalism. Also other smaller essays like “Ariosto and the Arabs”—that is another thing, he was incredibly prophetic as to the significance of the Middle East, the “Orient,” he had a vision that was incredible in terms of world culture and the importance of various parts of world culture that the West had to recognize as essential. Aside from Borges, which writers on translation have I really liked? I am always intrigued by what writers themselves have to say, like Nabokov or Pound, even though they may be way off. I’ve always tried to go to primary texts. That’s what intrigues me. From the theoreticians I find what I know about Schleiermacher to be interesting but I am hardly an expert in German linguistics or philosophy, and most academics who discuss and draw conclusions from him don’t know his context well enough either. I was drawn probably for all the wrong reasons to Derrida, he is very provocative. But, in fact, one of the problems we have is that, unless you are a scholar of German philosophy, you can’t be certain you are getting it right. The same thing happens with Benjamin (who perhaps didn’t know what he himself was saying, half the time), or with semioticians such as Eco. On the other hand, some scientific approaches depart from coherent literary perspectives and can be useful. As you know, in *The Subversive Scribe*, I felt as if I’d discovered gunpowder when I stumbled upon metonymy, so to speak. Metonymy seemed the closest to defining what translation is as a linguistic process, that is, an associative process; I think people will find this is true if they really examine it in detail. But that’s a scientific explanation and even though I sensed its relevance and enjoyed the moment I discovered it, I think it would be foolish to place too much emphasis on such explanations, that is, to try to explain everything from that one perspective.

MCG: In your writings it is evident that you always go back to the literary texts for your reflection on translation. You construct a kind of mosaic of fragments, like an archive. In recent years, speaking of which, there has been an increasing interest in the “translator’s archive,” that is, in turning to translation and translator-author documents as scholarly materials. Often the relationship an author establishes with the translator is different from that with scholars and critics; authors may be

willing to open up to translators in ways they would be reluctant to do it with critics and scholars. There is a more intimate relationship at times, which may have to do with a shared experience of the materiality of writing. What do you think is unique about this relationship and about the documents resulting from it? What kind of research material emerges from the translator's archive? Do you have an actual archive?

SJL: I agree that those documents are important. Actually, as early as 1984 I was in communication with the Princeton Firestone Library because they were collecting letters and manuscripts of Latin American writers. This library has a very extensive collection of Latin American writers. I almost sold my papers to them but then I realized that they didn't really consider the importance of the translator's role, they were interested in my papers purely as access to the writers. Meanwhile, Breon Mitchell, a fellow translator, started another project at the Lilly Library at Indiana University, and he said that in their collection they were interested in the translators and not only in the writer. Ultimately that's what I've done, the Lilly Library has most of my manuscripts and drafts—they were interested in the various drafts of the translation. They also have many letters, most of my correspondence, manuscripts, and drafts of manuscripts. I also sent them letters with publishers. I have done a lot of work with several magazines, as guest editor or contributor, for many years, starting in the 70s. That was another way of getting writers out there and getting your work out. In short, I think that having all those documents available can be useful. Since I've been teaching translation—which really means teaching students how to think about translation—whenever I showed students working materials like these they learned so much. I would say that the papers of a translator are as important as any critic's and scholar's, and often as important as that of famous writers like Hemingway and Faulkner; people should realize what goes on in the process of translation and its place in literary production.

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