

**Translating a Translingual text: *Primeros Dias Porteños* by Anna**

**Kazumi Stahl**

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**Introduction**

On 6 July 1988 I arrived in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the first stop on a ten-week tour of the Americas, north and south. Invited to join a university friend at the start of what for him would be a six month world tour, it was my first overseas journey as an adult, one for which I was enthusiastic, but quite unprepared. I spoke no Spanish and knew almost nothing about South America. My only knowledge of Argentina had been gleaned a few years earlier waking up each morning over a period of several weeks and listening together with my mother to radio accounts of events overnight in the country's short war with Britain. Born and raised in Australia, I was strongly influenced by my mother's British culture and, to a lesser extent, by a quite mixed set of eastern and northern European traditions from my father's side of the family.

My initial visit to Buenos Aires began a fascination with the city and with Latin America more broadly, one that grew steadily over the succeeding quarter century. This culminated in my decision to train as a language teacher and translator and to relocate to the region. Over many years, my journeys to Buenos Aires would conclude with a visit to one of its seemingly infinite number of bookshops, to buy a work of fiction set in the city, as a way

of keeping it alive in my imagination upon return home to Australia. The collection of short stories, *Buenos Aires, la ciudad como un plano*,<sup>1</sup> was one such purchase. To find contained within it, *Primeros días porteños*, an account of the initial impressions of Buenos Aires formed by another unprepared visiting university student, of similar age and with equally complex ancestry, following her arrival in the city less than a fortnight earlier than my own in 1988, was both coincidental and serendipitous. As the choice of source text for a translation from Spanish into English to complete my translation studies at Monash University, *Primeros días porteños (Días)* was irresistible.

*Días* recounts, in the form of a first-person diary, nine days in the life of its author. The diary starts from the moment of the author's arrival in Buenos Aires in June 1988 and the instant cultural and linguistic shock which that provoked, to the moment when the linguistic challenge was suddenly recognised as manageable. Between these two poles, the diary paints a vivid picture, both of the surrounding physical and cultural setting that is the city of Buenos Aires, and of the city's inhabitants, the *Porteños*.<sup>2</sup> Written in the historic present tense, the diary is introduced by and interspersed with present day authorial intrusions, which comment on or further illuminate the diary, or alternatively present other anecdotes or encounters that are neither present tense nor belong to the period covered by the diary. Although the narrator never discloses the enormous significance of those nine days on her path to becoming a Spanish language writer, it is at all times evident to the reader, given that the diary is published in a collection of stories by well-known contemporary Argentinean authors.

### Extra and in-textual analysis that informs the translation

Anna Kazumi Stahl has lived in Buenos Aires since 1995, working as a writer, a translator and a teacher. However, as she relates in the opening line of *Días*, when she arrived on that first occasion in 1988, she had prepared herself neither "cartographically" nor "linguistically": she had no map and she spoke no Spanish. She has since written a novel and a collection of short stories and has regularly contributed columns to the Buenos Aires daily newspapers *Clarín*, *La Nación* and *Página/12*. Her work has been nominated for the prestigious Rómulo Gallegos International Novel Prize, awarded previously to Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, Roberto Bolaño and the Argentine novelist and critic Ricardo Piglia. As reported in a New York Times article about Kazumi Stahl, Piglia himself has compared her to Vladimir Nabokov, commending Kazumi Stahl for having achieved "the feat of being trans-

parent and mysterious” and showing a “mastery of the poetics of estrangement.”<sup>3</sup> Susana Guzner describes Kazumi Stahl as “an exquisite writer, who with elegant craftsmanship brings together sensitive and sensuous stories, which though abundant with feelings, travel lightly to the heart.” (My translation)<sup>4</sup> Strikingly, all this is performed in Spanish, a second language learned only in adulthood. This is an overarching extra-textual issue through which to view Kazumi Stahl’s work. It is an essential consideration for a translator of her writing. Kazumi Stahl explains the attraction of Spanish:

I loved the expressive aspect of Spanish, with its use of gestures, of hands, of arms, of eyes. In the beginning it made me a little dizzy, but one can steal something from this expressivity to be more open. I liked the idea of living in this language and of sucking its energy like a vampire.<sup>5</sup>

Kazumi Stahl’s Spanish is the so-called River Plate variety (*Rioplatense*), spoken and written by the Porteños, and by those in neighbouring provinces of Argentina and Uruguay bordering the River Plate estuary.<sup>6</sup> In its spoken form, Rioplatense is performed with what is often described as an Italian-influenced accent. It has unique prosodic features. Like many language varieties, Rioplatense is distinguished from its standard by a particular lexicon. It also uses an archaic informal second-person subject pronoun, which is accompanied by significant morphological irregularity on many highly recurring verbs in the indicative and imperative moods.<sup>7</sup>

Kazumi Stahl has argued that writing in Spanish allows her a “productive narrowness,” whereas in English she is “too conscious of the raw materials of writing,” leading to texts which are heavier owing to the abundance of linguistic alternatives.<sup>8</sup> Kazumi Stahl is quoted in *The New York Times*:

Like any good Southerner, [in English] I get attached to the words and all the resonances and so everything gets a little bit embroidered . . . [Spanish, on the other hand] took everything away from me except primary colors . . . It’s not that I was necessarily working on a smaller canvas than in English, but I was working with fewer elements, and therefore every stroke had to be a stroke that counted.<sup>9</sup>

Kazumi Stahl’s own metaphor is sculpting, as she reports to Pedro Rey. His summary of her approach is as follows:

What was most appealing, however, was not the quantity of synonyms, the verbal lushness or the Italianized musicality, but the possibility of exercising a kind of personal literary exorcism. As a writer, the important thing was not the promised excesses, but instead the limitations that the acquired language was imposing. As she says, writing

is like sculpting. Remove, don't add.<sup>10</sup>

It is clear that Kazumi Stahl regards the limitations of writing in a second language as a virtue born of necessity. The reader might expect to encounter in her Spanish a simplicity in lexis and grammar, infused with touches of Rioplatense.

*Días* is an apt choice for translation since, by its very nature, it recounts the author's initial contact with an unfamiliar culture and language and her incipient attempts to translate these into her own language and culture, in order that she could "orient" or "guide" herself. These words become something of a motif as the story unfolds. That translation is itself an embedded theme, should come as no surprise. According to Francine Masielo, an earlier Kazumi Stahl collection, *Catástrofes naturales*, contains stories which "focus on the translator's mediating role between English, Japanese, and Spanish."<sup>11</sup> It is also consistent with an Argentinian literary tradition—as is shown by Sergio Waisman in *Borges and Translation: The Irreverence of the Periphery*,<sup>12</sup>—and a more broadly Latin American tradition, as Edwin Gentzler shows in *Translation and Identity in the Americas: New Directions in Translation Theory*. Gentzler writes:

I look at the work of writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa, tracing their use of translation as a theme and showing how understanding translation becomes a key to understanding both the fiction itself, and, by extension, the cultural formation in Spanish-speaking South America.<sup>13</sup>

Gentzler's central argument is that "translation in the Americas is less something that happens between separate and distinct cultures and more something that is constitutive of those cultures."<sup>14</sup> It is illustrated in particular through Borges.<sup>15</sup> According to Gentzler, Borges questioned his contemporaries' attempts to define a monolithic Argentine national literature arising out of the immigrant cultures and identities said to be present in the country, but which were less unified and homogenous than was commonly assumed.<sup>16</sup> This is perhaps illustrated in "El Congreso," a story in which Borges describes the attempted establishment in Buenos Aires of a world assembly. The multiple identities that each member of the assembly can be said to represent soon become evident. The story's narrator (Ferri) relates:

It was at that point, I believe, that Fermín interrupted.

"Ferri can represent wops," he said with a snort of laughter. Don Alejandro looked at him sternly.

"Sr. Ferri," don Alejandro said serenely, "represents immigrants,

whose labors are even now helping to build the nation.”

Fermín Eguren could never stand me. He thought highly of himself on several counts: for being a Uruguayan, for coming of native stock . . . for being descended from the Basques . . .<sup>17</sup>

To the extent that *Días* describes the recollections of a modern day immigrant of her own attempts to translate what she was observing and hearing at the point of arrival in Argentina into her prevailing cultural frame and identity, the translator might consider what that pre-existing cultural frame and identity was. As Borges himself might have predicted, the answer is by no means straightforward.

Kazumi Stahl grew up in the cultural melting pot of New Orleans, amongst what Guzner refers to as “its Spanish and French colonial vestiges, reflected in the music that permeates the life of the people and in the baroque Catholicism inhabited by saints and relics in close cohabitation with voodoo.”<sup>18</sup> Her American father was a Catholic of German origin and her mother, a Japanese Shinto Buddhist. Kazumi Stahl has said of her childhood: “I never felt like the United States was 100 percent my home.”<sup>19</sup> She studied literature, first in Boston, then in Germany and finally at the University of California at Berkeley.

This heterocultural and heterolingual background will have constituted Kazumi Stahl’s frame at the time of the experience related in *Días*. The dominant culture of her homeland presumably loomed large, but with an already well-developed openness to and fascination for other cultures. Kazumi Stahl’s first visit to Buenos Aires was the accidental result of an interest in tracing the path of Asian immigration to Latin America. Her permanent relocation to Buenos Aires in 1995 was to study the relationship between immigration and fiction in the South American, North American and German literary traditions.<sup>20</sup>

However, Kazumi Stahl’s recollection of the experience, as transmitted through *Días*, occurs in the present tense. This poses another question for the translator: What are the author’s prevailing affiliations and identity? The epitexts are again informative:

The codes of different cultures live in me (the north American of my upbringing and my early schooling, the Japanese of the domestic family space, the German of the other part of the family and my university studies, and also the Argentine as the context in which I currently live and work). Feeling the co-existence of these influences (or resources), I sense something akin to this multicultural identity even though I believe that identities were never as homogenous as the discourse appears to allow.<sup>21</sup>

Kazumi Stahl goes on to state that fiction is her way of exploring identity construction. She reports separately:

I guess that what I'm trying to talk about more than anything else is the question of the components of identity and how we end up putting them together . . . I'm interested in the stories of people who choose to leave and install themselves somewhere else—how you do that, why you do it and whether you can do it.<sup>22</sup>

Guzner cites a statement by Kazumi Stahl in another interview: “For me, a single identity is a limitation . . . it is the different identities that in reality create a centre . . . Perhaps one should begin to think about not having a homeland, or at least not just one.”<sup>23</sup> This finds an echo in Masiello’s analysis of *Catástrofes naturales*: “While the collection as a whole is designed to complicate our sense of place of origin, it also tests the languages of self-identity and our preconceived assurances about national belonging.”<sup>24</sup>

Kazumi Stahl is also a translingual writer under the definition provided by Jan Walsh Hockenson and Marcella Munson: those who write in more than one language and who translate their own work between those languages.<sup>25</sup> The English language version of Kazumi Stahl’s novel *Flores de un solo día* was published in Kazumi Stahl’s own translation. Masiello notes that *Catástrofes naturales* is a collection of short stories, some written by Kazumi Stahl in Spanish and some translated by her into Spanish from English.<sup>26</sup> Rita Wilson argues that this phenomenon (“self translation” as she refers to it) “is often associated with the problematisation of identities.”<sup>27</sup>

The centrality of identity to Kazumi Stahl’s literature project is apparent. Kazumi Stahl’s conception of culture and identity in general and of her own in particular, as expressed by the mature self in the epitexts, must surely be a consideration for the translator when thinking about a source text which describes Kazumi Stahl’s recollections of a key cultural and linguistic encounter that the younger self experienced. This event was clearly a crucial step on her journey towards resolving the adolescent self’s confusion about “home” and towards recognition that culture and identity are not homogeneous, but are constructed in each individual from multiple influences (perhaps, as Gentzler argues, through the act of translation itself).

If Gentzler proposes that in Latin America translation constitutes culture, in *Unfolding the City: Women Write the City in Latin America*, Elisabeth Guerrero and Anna Lambright propose the precise venue where this process occurs: “The city is not only a site built of steel and glass but is also both a product and a generator of modern culture.” They continue:

The city plays a particularly important role in Latin America, where

urban areas hold a near monopoly on centralized political and economic resources and are home to a rapidly expanding majority of the hemisphere's population [and] of special interest is how women belonging to the intellectual and professional elite, as well as to marginalized and disenfranchised groups negotiate their dwellings and articulate their urban lives.<sup>28</sup>

*Días* is noteworthy for the predominance of female characters, most particularly the narrator herself. The narrator's academic supervisor is also female. Her mother appears in the story, but her father does not. Male characters fill subservient and incidental roles. The only unsympathetic character in the text, an American tourist unable to "orient" himself, is male. The narrator's already fully acculturated erstwhile fellow student and now flatmate/guide is a commanding figure, whose mastery of Spanish allows her to always get the better of male moneychangers and taxi drivers. Although she leaves Buenos Aires unexpectedly to an uncertain future at the invitation of a man in another country, her risky departure, itself an act of affirmation, has the positive consequence of empowering the narrator by freeing her to find her own independent path in the city. The narrator and her flatmate/guide are female intellectuals or professionals in Guerrero and Lambright's great Latin American city and this female narrative writes that city. The story's gender dimension is both a textual and extra-textual consideration for the translator.

On the cliché that women write for other women, Kazumi Stahl responds: "In my opinion there is a certain more 'feminine' sensitivity that can inform writing, but it is not only women who write with that and not all women writers necessarily favour that dimension in their work."<sup>29</sup> Other texts by Kazumi Stahl dealing with questions of identity and translation are semi- or covertly autobiographical. The Japanese protagonist in *Flores de un solo día* for example, travels from her home in Buenos Aires to New Orleans to uncover a family secret. On the cliché of women's literature being autobiographical, Kazumi Stahl says:

[I]t is said that all creative work is to some extent autobiographical, or is the product of life experiences, whilst being at the same time invented, born in the imagination. Personally, I have a feeling that it has something to do with the way memory works, as an influence in the creative process and in the production of palpable intensity, sensitive to the work.<sup>30</sup>

*Días* is an overtly autobiographical text, a key genre consideration for the translator. The core of *Días* is the diary which, because it is written in the first person historical present tense, reads as a real-time status update, a preview

of the way lives are immediately recorded and simultaneously broadcast, albeit it in a less detailed and reflective fashion, in the present day on social media. Conventional diaries are not generally written in this way of course. In the tumult (or hurricane, to use Kazumi Stahl's metaphor) of arrival in a new country and a new cultural and linguistic environment, with the life-changing significance of the encounter only becoming evident to the author much later in life, it is clear that *Días* is a fictionalised account that reconstructs thoughts and images built around the bare bones of the key events and the real protagonists. As a genre then, *Días* perhaps falls more properly into the category of autofiction. A 2012 New York University conference defined autofiction as combining "two apparently contradictory concerns: autobiography and fiction. Authors depict aspects of their lives, usually using the first person singular, giving their real names to their narrators, modifying significant aspects of their lives or 'characters' using fiction in the service of a search for self."<sup>31</sup>

### Applying the analysis

The foregoing extra-textual analysis allows the translator to make strategic choices and determine an approach to the translation project. We can draw the strands of the analysis together. We find a writer who uses a particular variety of her second language and who embraces the linguistic limits that imposes. The author's mother tongue belies her more complex and heterogeneous cultural background and her interest, as a translingual writer, in identity formation, particularly in the context of immigration. This interest is typically reflected in her work. We find an autofictive diarised source text written primarily in the historical present tense, that overtly presents (consistent with the requirements of the broader collection of which it forms a part) a portrayal of a key national space. It does so via an account which thematises translation itself, in its description of a linguistic and cultural encounter that involved strong female protagonists and that had profound consequences for the author on her journey as a translingual writer towards reconciling and understanding her own identity.

To successfully translate, it is important to ensure that any textual clues related to these extra-textual factors are not elided in the target text. If need be, they can be made slightly more salient.

The distinctiveness of *Rioplátense* for example, can be reinforced for target text readers. In *Días*, the narrator notices a moneychanger's unusual Italian accent, but the matter is not revisited, perhaps because the meaning will be quite apparent to source culture readers. With a small amount of license, the translation ascribes the adjectives "unusual" and "unexpected" to

the Spanish description for subsequently appearing speaking characters and refers to an “Argentine Spanish” dictionary left by behind by her flatmate.

The structural gender differences between Spanish (in which nouns and adjectives carry gender) and English (where they do not) must be considered. For example, the gender of the narrator’s language teacher (*profesora*), another female professional in the city, would be elided in the translation without a compensation in the co-text: the possessive adjective “her,” not present in the source, is introduced in reference to an item (a cassette player) the teacher uses in class.

That the story reflects the author’s interest in issues of identity related to geographic spaces (as opposed to merely presenting a geographic space), can be communicated in the translation by recognising that the recurring references to maps and cartography and the recurring use of verbs and nouns based on the root “orient” (e.g. *orientar*, *orientación*) are not mere lexical repetition in need of more creative substitution, but are more likely carefully constructed source text motifs that need to be respected.

The analysis can also help resolve more common translation difficulties. The translator might be encouraged to look for more direct and simple lexical solutions in situations where multiple target language near-synonyms exist, or where there are metaphors and similes which are seemingly complex to unravel. If the language constraints for the source text author force her to go “straight to the point,” then this is where the translator can begin looking for solutions. Similarly, awareness of Kazumi Stahl’s translingualism and its limitations has explanatory power that prevents the translator agonising too long when occasionally confusing lexical and grammatical choices are encountered.

The analysis demands consideration of the use of the historical present in *Días* and its potential replication in the translation. If, for Philip Hensher, use of the historical present is “an abdication of narrative responsibility” and product of “a thousand low-level creative writing tutors, clinging to the belief that you can ‘make your writing more vivid’ by turning to the present tense,”<sup>32</sup> for John Mullan it is “a form of narration that has been employed with great intelligence in some of the best novels of recent years.”<sup>33</sup> Mullan points to JM Coetzee as a well-known and brilliant exponent of the technique in English. Epitext analysis reveals that Kazumi Stahl is herself an admirer of the same author: “I read [him] in English because the rare and powerful music in his phrases excites me, even in sentences which have little emphasis or status in the construction of the tale.”<sup>34</sup> The analysis thus provides reason enough for retaining this tense in the English translation.

*Días* is a part of a greater whole, and the translator cannot overlook its contribution to that whole. The peritexts for *Buenos Aires, la ciudad como un*

*plano* indicate that the city is the subject. Buenos Aires is an emerging global city, in cultural terms if not economic. The peritexts unconsciously invoke the names of well-known streets and locales without explicitation.<sup>35</sup> *Buenos Aires, la ciudad como un plano* is thus an urban anthology written by modern Argentine storytellers for Argentines. Few members of the target language and culture audience for a translation of *Días* will be versed in what the mere expressing of names such as “the Obelisk” or more oblique references such “the widest and most complex avenue I have ever seen” will evoke. An English translation must therefore grapple with a source text in which much of the intertextuality arises from this very invocation of geographic place names which will have little resonance for a target audience.<sup>36</sup>

Relevant here is the choice between foreignising the translation on the one hand and domesticating it on the other. Foreignising might occur at lexical level for example, through retention of untranslated or unexplicated items of source text cultural realia. More radically, at sentence level it might occur through retention of source text syntax, even where that produces an unnatural target language result. Lawrence Venuti, a leading advocate of foreignising, calls for translations that “resist fluency” and use non-standard variants in the translation.<sup>37</sup> It is the extension of a much older idea, expressed in the nineteenth century by Friedrich Schleiermacher: leave the writer in peace and move the reader towards the writer.<sup>38</sup>

This key debate in translation studies arises particularly in the treatment of postcolonial literature in English translation. One of the purposes of a foreignising strategy may be to challenge hegemonic cultural norms and world views and to introduce more foreign literatures to English-speaking markets: Venuti notes that even Borges was only translated into English by United States publishers after French translations had appeared.<sup>39</sup> To what extent Latin American countries are postcolonial in the sense often intended in this debate is perhaps questionable: most have been independent of their historical colonisers nearly as long as the United States and much longer than countries like Australia or New Zealand.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, even if Argentina is home to postcolonial writing, because of the peculiar direction of the translanguaging in this case (a writer from the literary tradition of one colonising nation relocates to another colonising nation’s former colony and chooses to write in a local variety of that second coloniser’s standard language) the extent to which *Días* is a site where this issue can be debated seems doubtful. Masiello points out that “any dominant power is rebuked by the questionable location both within and beyond the framework of fiction (is the writer an Argentine, a North American, or a woman of Asian descent).”<sup>41</sup>

The matter is resolved, however, by the recognition that the source text is itself foreignised. At various points in the diary and the authorial intrusions,

Kazumi Stahl invokes realia from outside the source culture (e.g. bullet train, *ikebana*, sit-ins for the Democratic Party, Oakland Down Home Blues) without explication. Indeed, since the very presence of Rioplatense in *Días* foreignises it for a source language readership outside the particular source culture represented, the source text is doubly foreignised. The source culture reader therefore has some work to do. She or he is trusted by Kazumi Stahl to be capable of resolving the significance of the foreign realia or Rioplatense lexis from context, or to be motivated to search outside the text. As a translator, I see no need to not pay similar respect to the target culture reader. The translation is therefore foreignised to the extent that it does not explicate a range of cultural realia and place names present in the source text. Nor does it translate many lexical items that the narrator encounters but cannot comprehend, on shop fronts or menus, as she navigates her way around the city. This represents quite a significant foreignising of the translation, since this is a narrative that describes a city and such realia, place names and other identifiers, are ubiquitous. This approach changes only in the penultimate paragraph of the translation, when the narrator again lists several items of Spanish lexis, this time to signify that the previously foreign is at last becoming clear.

Marina Manfredi argues that the most radical foreignisation approach is not the only solution for conveying cultural and linguistic diversity from a peripheral language to English. Citing numerous scholars she comments:

[T]ranslation, nowadays, is more than a means for bridging gaps between cultures: it is a tool for producing meanings that originated in a multicultural encounter which is typical of our contemporary world.<sup>42</sup>

In this context, it is notable that in highlighting particular aspects of the source culture that were salient (i.e. foreign) to Kazumi Stahl in her first days in Buenos Aires, *Días* reveals for alert source culture readers in a subtle and oblique way, without explication, particular aspects of their world that they might otherwise take for granted as universals. The narrator's surprise at how many bank notes in local currency she receives in exchange for a small amount of American dollars, is an example. Thus, the curious situation arising from translating a translingual writer from their second language back to their first (in this case, back into English, the language in which the experience related by the diary was lived but is not written), gives rise to the opportunity for cultural diversity to be conveyed in both directions: from the peripheral language to English and the reverse.<sup>43</sup>

Clearly there is a lot already going on here. As Gentzler eloquently writes: "[E]very act of writing is already a translation, or better said, a translation of a translation of a translation."<sup>44</sup> It seems appropriate then, to agree

with Manfredi (drawing on the work of both Michaela Wolf and of Homi Bhabha) that an approach falling a little short of the most radical foreignisation “can result in a dialectical interaction of different cultures that hybridize, without giving up their characteristics, through a process of mutual contamination.”<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, the option to further foreignise the translation by also transferring source text syntax (for example, consistent with natural Spanish syntax, *Días* frequently sentence-fronts adverbial phrases in a way that would be salient but discordant in English) is not exercised in the translation. Finally, since *Días*’ text is doubly foreignised, at least for a segment of its readership, I seek at least the same for the translation. As there are many items of United States cultural realia, I compensate for users of other Englishes by choosing British English over American, where competing lexical possibilities present (e.g. “sidewalk” versus “footpath” as translations for *vereda*: “notes” versus “bills” for *billetes*) and where there is a choice between two spelling systems. Since Kazumi Stahl is a self-proclaimed cultural hybrid with more than one single *patria*, this strategy seems to do justice to her overall project.

### Conclusion

I too am a cultural hybrid, caught between my heterogeneous northern European and eastern European roots, my rather more homogenous northern English origins, and having grown up in an Australia which, though largely monolingual, has gradually shifted in my lifetime from a monolithic to a heterogeneous and now increasing globalised culture. Like Kazumi Stahl, the author and subject (together with the city itself) of *Días*, I am drawn away from these origins, away from my own birthplace and from my native English or any of the languages of my forebears, to the city and to the language of Buenos Aires. Once it was only the immigrant’s fate to be forever suspended between two worlds, in neither one nor the other, or perhaps in a threshold or a liminal space between cultures, the place where, according to translation theorists like Gentzler, translators and translation start to constitute culture.

<sup>46</sup> Marie Maclean quotes Michel Serres on the idea of the “threshold”:

A door opens or closes a threshold which is held to be such because at this spot a law is overturned: on the one side reigns a certain rule, on the other begins a new law so that the door rests on its hinges on a neutral line where the two rules of law balance and cancel each other. . . . The singular site is part of neither this world nor the other or else it belongs to both.<sup>47</sup>

Today, with more affordable international travel, as well as internet technology that makes it possible to live in one place yet experience aspects of another and interact in virtual form with this “other” on a daily basis, arriving at the threshold or occupying the third or liminal space ceases to be necessarily a fate and starts to become a choice available to a broader range of people.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, in the globalised city at least, people can find a physical manifestation of that “other” place, in a hybridised form or in an imperfect imitation or translation of it, if only in the shape of a restaurant, or a menu, or a dance form, or a religious practice, or a cultural venue. Or the translation of a minor piece of literature. The liminal space is thus ever expanding. My translation into English of *Primeros días porteños* takes that text into this liminal space, grows the space just a fraction further and might, I hope, invite its readers to embark on a similar journey to that which both translator and author have taken.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Arnaldo Calveyra et al, *Buenos Aires, la ciudad como un plano* (Buenos Aires: La Bestia Equilátera, 2010).
- <sup>2</sup> The word *porteño* is the demonym for those born in and inhabiting that part of Buenos Aires governed as the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. Those inhabiting parts of the periphery of the city located across the border in the Province of Buenos Aires (which almost entirely encircles the Autonomous City), are known by the demonym *bonaerense*. The Autonomous City and the Province of Buenos Aires border the River Plate estuary on its Argentinian side. Several Uruguayan provinces border the estuary to the east. The word *porteño* can also be used as an adjective in relation to aspects of the city. It refers to Buenos Aires’ status as a major port city (*puerto*).
- <sup>3</sup> Larry Rohter, “2 Artists Follow Muses to Success in Argentina,” *The New York Times*, July 2, 2003, 1. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/02/books/2-artists-follow-muses-to-success-in-argentina.html?pagewanted=4&src=pm>. The quotation attributed to Piglia is not referenced in the article.

- <sup>4</sup> Susana Guzner, “La literatura carnal de Anna Kazumi Stahl,” accessed May 21, 2016, <http://www.ciudaddemujeres.com/articulos/La-literatura-carnal-de-Anna>. Original Spanish: “una escritora exquisita que amalgama con elegante artesanía historias sensitivas y carnales que viajan al corazón de quien las lee ligeras de equipaje y pletóricas de sensaciones.” Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
- <sup>5</sup> Pedro Rey, “La sintaxis del silencio,” *La Nacion*, December 8, 2002, [http://www.lanacion.com.ar/nota.asp?nota\\_id=456407&high=anna%20kazumi](http://www.lanacion.com.ar/nota.asp?nota_id=456407&high=anna%20kazumi). Original Spanish: “El nivel expresivo del castellano me encantó, con su utilización de gestos, de manos, de brazos, de ojos. Al principio me mareó un poco, pero uno puede robar algo de esta expresividad para abrirse más. Me gustó la idea de vivir dentro de este idioma, de vampirizar su energía.”
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* [El castellano Rioplatense es] “el único que conozco”. My translation: “River Plate Spanish is the only one I know.”
- <sup>7</sup> The archaic informal second-person subject pronoun is *vos* instead of the standard *tu*. Examples of verb irregularity which accompany the *vos* form include: “to have” (*tenés* in Rioplatense indicative instead of the more common *tienes*), “to be” (*sos* in Rioplatense indicative instead of *eres*) and “to say” (*decí* in imperative instead of *di*). Thus, the most frequently expressed present tense and imperative ideas (i.e. those exchanged between two familiar interlocutors using everyday verbs) sound and look very different when uttered and written by users of Rioplatense, in comparison with these same ideas expressed in many other varieties of Spanish (compare, for example, Rioplatense *vos sos* to standard *tu eres*). The *vos* form and its irregular verb conjugations are not however the exclusive preserve of Rioplatense. They are found elsewhere, for example in Paraguayan Spanish, however the prosodic qualities of the two varieties are quite different.
- <sup>8</sup> Rey, “La sintaxis del silencio.” Original Spanish: “Al empezar a escribir en castellano descubrí una suerte de estrechez productiva. Para mí carecía de cualquier eco o resonancia personal y a la vez me pasaba por alto las sutilezas . . . Podía ver el cuento, la arquitectura del cuento y focalizar mejor. Fue un retorno fascinante a la inocencia porque en inglés era demasiado consciente de la materia prima de la escritura. Podía buscar y plantearme todas las alternativas, analizar todas las maneras de decir algo y eso volvía los textos cargados y opresivos. En castellano, al no tener tantas opciones, estoy obligada a ir al grano. La sensación es mucho más concreta.” “When I began to write in Spanish I discovered a sort of productive narrowness. For me, it lacked any echo or personal resonance and at the time I ignored its subtleties. I could see the story, the architecture of the story and I could target it better. It was a fascinating return to innocence because in English I was too conscious of the raw materials of writing. I could look for and reflect on all the alternatives, analyse all the ways to say something and this made all the texts heavy and oppressive. In Spanish, not having so many options, I am obliged to go straight to the point. The feeling is much more concrete.”
- <sup>9</sup> Rohter, “2 Artists,” 2.
- <sup>10</sup> Rey, “La sintaxis del silencio.” Original Spanish: “Lo que más la sedujo, sin embargo, no fue la cantidad de sinónimos, la frondosidad verbal o la musicalidad ita-

lianizante sino la posibilidad de ejercitarse en una suerte de exorcismo literario personal. Como escritora, lo importante no eran los excesos prometidos, sino las limitaciones que la lengua adquirida le imponía. Escribir, dice, es como esculpir. Quitar, no agregar.”

- <sup>11</sup> Francine Masiello, *The Art of Transition: Latin America and the Neoliberal Crisis* (United States: Duke University Press, 2001), 154.
- <sup>12</sup> Sergio Waisman, *Borges and Translation: The Irreverence of the Periphery* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005).
- <sup>13</sup> Edwin Gentzler, *Translation and Identity in the Americas: New Directions in Translation Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 108.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>15</sup> A Borges poem (“Buenos Aires”) is intertextually referenced in the title *Buenos Aires, la ciudad como un plano*.
- <sup>16</sup> Gentzler, *Translation and Identity in the Americas*, 110.
- <sup>17</sup> Jose Luis Borges, “The Congress,” trans. Andrew Hurley, *Collected Fictions* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 427.
- <sup>18</sup> Guzner, “La literatura carnal de Anna Kazumi Stahl.” Original Spanish: “con sus vestigios de colonia española y francesa, reflejados en la música que penetra la vida de su gente y en el catolicismo barroco poblado de santos y de reliquias en estrecha convivencia con el vudú.”
- <sup>19</sup> Rohter “2 Artists,” 1.
- <sup>20</sup> Rey, “La sintaxis del silencio.”
- <sup>21</sup> Guzner, “La literatura carnal de Anna Kazumi Stahl.” Original Spanish: “En mi persona conviven los códigos de distintas culturas (la estadounidense de mi crianza y mi primera escolarización, la japonesa del espacio doméstico familiar, la alemana de otra parte de la memoria familiar y de mis estudios universitarios, y también la argentina como contexto en el que vivo y trabajo actualmente). En el hecho de sentir una ‘convivencia’ de estas influencias (o recursos) puedo reconocer algo afín a esto de ‘la identidad multicultural’, aunque creo que las identidades jamás fueron tan homogéneas como parecería permitir el discurso.” At one point in *Días*, Kazumi Stahl also admits to her “Anglo Saxon insistence on arming oneself with mutual exclusivity.”
- <sup>22</sup> Rohter “2 Artists,” 1.
- <sup>23</sup> Guzner, “La literatura carnal de Anna Kazumi Stahl.” Original Spanish: “Para mí la identidad única es una carencia...son las identidades distintas las que, en realidad, crean un centro... Tal vez haya que empezar a pensar en no tener patria, o al menos en no tener una sola.”
- <sup>24</sup> Masiello, *Art of Transition*, 155.
- <sup>25</sup> Jan Walsh Hockenson and Marcella Munson, *The Bilingual Text: History and Theory of Literary Self-Translation* (Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 2007), 14.
- <sup>26</sup> Masiello, *Art of Transition*, 155.

- <sup>27</sup> Rita Wilson, "The Writer's Double: Translation, Writing, and Autobiography," *Romance Studies* 27, no. 3 (2009): 186-198. Wilson analyses the work of the Italian translingual writer Francesca Duranti, who like Kazumi Stahl, but unlike many others who have translingualism imposed on them by factors such as political exile, chose to live in another language environment.
- <sup>28</sup> Elisabeth Guerrero and Anna Lambright, *Unfolding the City: Women Write the City in Latin America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xi.
- <sup>29</sup> Guzner, "La literatura carnal de Anna Kazumi Stahl." Original Spanish: "En mi opinión hay cierta sensibilidad más 'femenina' que puede informar la escritura pero no sólo las mujeres escriben así, ni todas las escritoras mujeres privilegian necesariamente esa dimensión en sus trabajos."
- <sup>30</sup> Guzner, "La literatura carnal de Anna Kazumi Stahl." Original Spanish: "...se dice que toda obra creativa es en algún punto autobiográfica o tiene influencias de la vida del que la produce, sin dejar de ser a su vez es inventado, nacido desde la imaginación. Personalmente, tengo la sensación de que eso tiene algo que ver con cómo funciona la memoria, cómo influencia en el proceso creativo y en la producción de una intensidad palpable, sensible para la obra."
- <sup>31</sup> New York University, "NYU to Host 'Autofiction: Literature in France Today,'" March 13, 2012. <http://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2012/03/13/nyu-to-host-autofiction-literature-in-france-todayapril-19-21.html>. Kazumi Stahl currently directs the Buenos Aires campus of New York University.
- <sup>32</sup> Philip Hensher, "The Booker Judges Should Take a Stand Against the Modish Present Tense," *The Daily Telegraph*, September 9, 2010. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/7991553/Opinion-Philip-Hensher.html>.
- <sup>33</sup> John Mullan, "A History of the Present," *The Guardian*, September 25, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/sep/25/author-present-tense-john-mullan>.
- <sup>34</sup> Guzner, "La literatura carnal de Anna Kazumi Stahl."
- <sup>35</sup> Amongst other peritexts, the back cover of the book reads as follows: "Buenos Aires. The names spell her out: Gaona, Directory, Juan de Garay, Rivadavia, Corrientes, Callao, Alem, Florida, Retiro, Coghlan, Barry, Plaza Once, Parque Chacabuco, Villa Devoto, Villa Urquiza, Villa Crespo, Villa del Parque. In front of or behind these settings and others, the chronicles and tales brought together here form a portrait of the diverse city and weave amongst them a kind of prayer that is also a celebration. Here is a calligraphic scale model illuminated by some of the most notable storytellers of current Argentine literature. A projection in which each tale draws another city, probing one Buenos Aires within another. And between one text and the next appears the city of the reader."
- <sup>36</sup> A more accessible instance of intertextuality in *Días* arises when the narrator describes in detail her first impressions of the apartment in which she is staying, likening its close proximity to other apartments viewed from a small window at the back, to the Hitchcock film *Rear Window*.
- <sup>37</sup> Anthony Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 112.
- <sup>38</sup> Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies* (London and New York:

Routledge, 2008), 144.

<sup>39</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 181. Venuti has also publically stated that a translator's decision to choose for translation a source text from a peripheral language is itself the first step in this process of challenge, a view he affirmed in his presentation on April 23, 2016 to the Sixth Latin American Translation and Interpreting Conference held in Buenos Aires ("Translating J V Foix's Daybook 2018, the Strangeness of Minority") and at his subsequent seminar "Translation theory and practice: instrumental versus hermeneutic models" held at the College of Public Translators of the City of Buenos Aires, on May 25, 2016.

<sup>40</sup> See Marina Manfredi, "Preserving Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in and through Translation: From Theory to Practice," *Mutatis Mutandis* 3, no. 1 (2010): 47–48. Manfredi traces postcolonial studies noting that it "can be said to have grown out of the dissolution of the great European empires in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s," whilst pointing out that postcolonial translation studies, which arose in the mid to late 1980s has more recently "broadened to include cases of general imbalance of power relations between any cultures/societies, even in settings not strictly speaking affected by colonialism."

<sup>41</sup> Masiello, *Art of Transition*, 156.

<sup>42</sup> Manfredi, *Preserving Linguistic and Cultural Diversity*, 54.

<sup>43</sup> The challenge of translating translingually has also been described by:

Guillermo Irizarry, "Travelling Textualities and Phantasmagoric Originals: A Reading of Translation in Three Recent Spanish-Caribbean Narratives," *Ciberletras: Revista de crítica literaria y de cultura* 4 (2001), accessed May 21, 2016, <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v04/Irizarry.html>.

Israel Reyes, "De-facing Cuba: Translating and Transfiguring Cristina Garcia's 'The Aguero Sisters,'" *Voice-Overs: Translation and Latin American Literature*, eds. Daniel Balderson and Marcy Schwartz (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 224-234.

Lori Ween, "Translational Backformations: Authenticity and Language in Cuban American Literature," *Comparative Literature Studies* 40, no. 2 (2003): 127-141.

<sup>44</sup> Edwin Gentzler, "Translation, Poststructuralism, and Power," *Translation and Power*, eds. Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 198. A similar claim is made by Waisman in *Borges and Translation*, 84: "To say that every act of writing is an act of translation may seem like an exaggeration. Yet I would like to begin . . . with that assertion, and with the premise that writing and translation are synonymous acts of creation."

<sup>45</sup> Manfredi, *Preserving Linguistic and Cultural Diversity*, 54.

<sup>46</sup> See also Sherry Simon, *Cities in Translation: Intersections of Language and Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012). Simon investigates bilingual global cities outside Latin America, where the two languages coexist and compete, and where, it is argued, cultures are created through a process of translation.

<sup>47</sup> Marie Maclean, "Pretexts and Paratexts: The Art of the Peripheral," *New Literary History* 22, no. 2 (1991): 273. In *Días* Kazumi Stahl uses the Spanish word *umbral*

to represent the doorway (the threshold, in AmE) to her home in San Francisco in 1988, the site where she first learns that she will be travelling to Buenos Aires, in what turns out to be a threshold moment in her life. In normal parlance in Buenos Aires, *umbral* is not a translation for the physical threshold or doorway that users of AmE people in the US might intend. But it is a translation for the more metaphoric idea of threshold described by Serres. *Días* contains two other references to thresholds or transitional spaces: the space between the aircraft and the air bridge on her arrival (which is indeed a liminal space, the crossing point from the neutral space of an international flight, to the sovereign space of another country); a staircase between the street and her language classroom, a “temporary space, a passage for the transition from below to above, from the street to the interior.”

<sup>48</sup> See Jolynna Sinanan, “Xin Yimin: ‘New’ Chinese Migration and New Media in a Trinidadian Town,” *Media and Communication in the Chinese Diaspora: Rethinking Transnationalism*, eds. Wanning Sun and John Sinclair (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), 210-226. Sinanan shows how new technology facilitates reaching into remote mediascapes and how this is becoming an integral aspect of the everyday spatiotemporal experience of a diaspora community.