

**Title page**

Title: The publication history of Jorge Luis Borges in Greece

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MA-thesis

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Date of completion: 13/07/2014

Word count: 18,206

The student is attending this master thanks to a scholarship of the Greek Onassis foundation.



*'I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.'*

Jorge Luis Borges

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## *The publication history of Jorge Luis Borges in Greece*

### *Introduction*

The topic of this dissertation concerns the publication history and reception of the Latin American author Jorge Luis Borges in Greece. The scope of the paper will be the examination of how the special case of Borges' literary creation was treated and promoted by Greek publishers. The decision of choosing this particular subject principally emerged from two factors; a significant first was a personal interest and admiration of the work of the Argentinian writer; another reason was that it was deemed interesting to attempt to delineate and assess the initiation, promotion and reception of Borges in the specific *locus* of the Greek publishing and literary landscape. It is the author's belief that the reception of a foreign writer forms part of the literary history of the receiving country. The reciprocal relation between author X and country Z illuminates parts of intellectual and cultural history as well as 'the processes involved in the dissemination of ideas and texts.'<sup>1</sup> After all, in a text's travel through time and places, the formulated receptions inevitably partly define the text anew, and influence its evaluation and further transmission. The history of the book, in its role in reconstructing transmission, reception and the desires that motivate them, 'is itself, an intending intervention that, through its representations, influences the process and hence the field itself.'<sup>2</sup>

It is indisputably the case that, in spite of its small geographical size, its limited scale of domestic book market, the low income per capita and the relatively low reading levels, Greece is a country that has consistently been importing a large amount of foreign literature in translation. As an aftermath of the uneven cultural exchanges between countries with a different amount of accumulated cultural capital and linguistic dynamics, it is only rational that while the prevailing countries export their cultural products widely

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<sup>1</sup> K.P. Jochum (ed.), *The reception of W.B.Yeats in Europe* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2006), p.viii.

<sup>2</sup>C. Squires, *Marketing literature. The making of contemporary writing in Britain* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.59.

and translate little, ‘the dominated countries export little and import a lot of foreign books, principally by translation.’<sup>3</sup> Indicatively, in a report from the National Book Centre it is stated that foreign books in translation represent a significant share of the market; this was over 40% between the years 2006-2008, but has declined towards slightly over 30% as a result of the financial crisis.<sup>4</sup> The Greek crisis initiates in 2008 as a part of the Eurozone crisis and exposes significant deficits of the Greek economy; years of tax evasions and political corruption create an outstanding debt to the European Union. In order to pay it back, harsh austerity measures are imposed to the Greek people. Inevitably, the cultural sector is also severely damaged; the governmental investments in culture as well as the citizens’ financial disposal in book purchases become scarce.

#### Number of books translated

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
4,373	4,230	4,442	3,789	3,173	2,672
42,5%	49,3%	41,6%	38,8%	34,2%	32,1%

Regardless of this recent state of affairs, the Greek publishing field in particular somehow seems to be constantly in crisis; some of the problems frequently identified are the lack of financial capital that has always harrowed medium and small scale publishers; also, the fact that the role of both editors and agents has been traditionally undermined or neglected. Simultaneously and most significantly, the reality remains that the publishing industry in Greece propagates and perpetuates old-fashioned, traditional norms, tactics and structures in which the publisher is regarded as the sole administrator of the company and the publishing house as a familial enterprise kept together by nepotistic bonds. As

<sup>3</sup> J. Heilbron and G. Sapiro, ‘Outline for a sociology of translation: Current issues and future prospects’, in M. Wolf and A. Fukari (eds), *Benjamins translation library: Constructing a sociology of translation* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007) pp.95-96.

<sup>4</sup> S. Kabouropoulos, ‘The book market in Greece’, *National Book Centre of Greece*, 8 (2012), p.6  
<http://www.ekebi.gr/frontoffice/portal.asp?cpage=NODE&cnode=397&clang=1> (10 July, 2014).

Feather observes, it is often the case that publishers from less developed and Third World countries are typically undercapitalized, lack easy access to modern production facilities and are constrained by an underdeveloped national market for books.<sup>5</sup>

However, despite the observed phenomenon of obsolete publishing structures within publishing companies, it is still admirable that in a country with a population of 11 million people, there are 374 active publishers in 1990 and 927 in 2011. The absence of large conglomerates leaves the field appropriately open for distribution between (relatively) large, medium and small scale publishers. According to a report of the statistic organization Hellastat in 2007, 798 publishers are at work in Greece; 21 of them of a large size for the Greek context, publishing more than 80 titles per year, 163 of them of an average size, publishing from 10 to 80 titles and 614 of them of a small size, with a production of only 10 titles or less per year.<sup>6</sup>

The large number of ongoing publishers, in spite of the above-mentioned obstacles, as well as the significant number of published books in translation, illustrates the diversity of the Greek publishing landscape and is indicative of the many stirring intentions for initiatives, as average and small publishers struggle to be as active as possible by the means available at their disposal. And as we will afterwards illustrate, it is with few exceptions mostly publishers of this kind who initiate the Greek readers to the work of Jorge Luis Borges.

After briefly delineating the contemporary Greek publishing field for the reader to acquire an idea of its scale and present state, we may now turn our gaze to the Latin American author. Borges (1899-1986) is an Argentinian short-story writer, poet and translator. Above I have referred to his case as special, as the literary genre sustained by him uniquely exhibits a fusion of elements such as labyrinths, mirrors, dreams and infinite libraries that construct a figurative universe through a Daedalus technique.

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<sup>5</sup> J. Feather, *Communicating knowledge: Publishing in the 21st century* (Munich: Saur, 2003), p.28.

<sup>6</sup> <[www.hellastat.com/resources/BookPublishing\\_el.pdf](http://www.hellastat.com/resources/BookPublishing_el.pdf)> (02 July, 2014).

Bearing upon -but not exactly being part of- the literary movements of surrealism and magical realism, some of the basic motifs consistently encountered in his works are the juxtapositions between life and death, myth and reality, oblivion and memory; the conceptual meaning of time, the deceptiveness of the external world, the mystery of human existence and the almost inevitable arbitrariness of every rationalistic thought; even the idea that the most insignificant and trivial thing can contain the whole universe. It is a genre without specific precedent; a form of literature that touches gently on philosophy. It does however have certain similarities with the work of other Latin American authors, such as Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Adolfo Bioy Casares and Gabriel García Márquez, especially in the mannerism of destabilizing the notion of conventional reality, time and space.

The induction of the Latin American author in Greece begins, as is often the case, with the appearance of sparse translations of his poems in literary magazines. However, from a very early stage and over the decades this initial representation is significantly amplified by publications not only of his poems but also of his essays and short stories, with the focus being on the latter. Thirteen Greek publishers of various size and *milieu* have ventured to publish aspects of the work of the Latin American author, with varying success.

Lastly, as an end to this brief introduction, the structure of this dissertation is as follows. In a sort of before, during and after path of the author's publication history, but not following it rigidly, the paper consists of three chapters: the first refers to the reluctant appearance of Borges in Greece and delves into the Greek publishing context during that time. In it the acquaintance of the Greek readers with published works of similar writing is also queried. The second chapter, the base of which comprises interviews with some of the Greek publishers that published Borges' texts, canvasses the kind of publishing houses that published Borges, their scale and specialisation, and sketches whether and how the Latin American author was marketed and advertised in Greece. In the third chapter the reception of his works by readers and critics is examined by probing the available reviews of his publications in magazines and newspapers.

## *Chapter 1*

### *1.1. Borgesian seeds in Greece*

The prehistory of Borges' absorption in Greece begins in 1947, when Aris Diktaios, a Greek novelist, poet and translator, translates in the magazine *Circle* the poem 'Dulcia linquimus arva' in the framework of a daring initiative to introduce Spanish-speaking writers in Greece; an initiative, however, that lacks immediate continuity. Borges by then has already published 3 collections of poems, some short stories and essays, but none of his books has been published in another language. In the year 'Dulcia' is translated in *Circle*, Borges is 48 years old and runs the literary journal *Anales de Buenos Aires* (1946-1948). In this first appearance to the Greek audience, he is presented alongside with the Mexican poet Alfonso Reyes, a poet greatly admired by Borges himself. The translation of the poem, admittedly with non-negligent errors and misconceptions, is accompanied by a brief laudatory biographical note and commentary; in it the Latin American author is characterized by Diktaios as the one unlocking the doors 'of the New Poetry, first of his kind in Argentina, inspired by the Spanish *Ultraismo*, with tentative surrealist reflections and personal transformations'; simultaneously, the motifs of his poetry are epitomized as 'the pampa and the dream, time and memory, silence and death'.<sup>7</sup>

Seventeen years later, in 1964, this enthusiastic but infertile germ is followed by another venture; the well-known poet Nanos Valaoritis translates Borges' parable *Los dos que soñaron* in the literary magazine *Again*. Valaoritis, one of the most distinguished Greek authors and playwrights of the twentieth century, presents Borges as 'an Argentinian poet with an ambiguous way of writing, who inaugurates a new genre of sibylic short stories'.<sup>8</sup>

These two initial undertakings, despite the fact that they are made by acclaimed poets in literary magazines of a well-established reputation, are not sufficient to trigger an ongoing reading interest around Borges. Perhaps this is due to the fact that these

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<sup>7</sup> D. Kalokyris, *Beth, an archive about Borges* (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 2007), p.84.

<sup>8</sup> Kalokyris, *Beth, an archive about Borges*, p.86.

translations constitute individual efforts, scattered and unsystematic. However, both Diktaios and Valaoritis have the intuition to discern the novelty of Borges' writing style. It is also worth noting that in both translators' commentary, the author's nationality is underlined; an underlining that, as we will illustrate later on, is for various reasons not employed by the publishers of his complete works.

In the years to come, Borges, by now-well established worldwide, eventually excites a specific part of the Greek reading audience; namely, his writing cultivates the interest of a highly educated reading elite. From 1965 to 1970, George Chourmouziadis, a Greek archaeologist and professor in the University of Thessaloniki who has lived for many years in Argentina, translates methodically many of Borges essays and short stories for *New Home*, one of the most influential and longevous literary journals of contemporary Greece with wide circulation. These translations, systematic and explanatory as they are, inaugurate an interest around Borges from a closed circle of initiated readers, translators and intellectuals.<sup>9</sup>

As a corollary, the translation and publication of his books in independent volumes is eventually launched in the decade of the 1970s; *Ficciones*, one of Borges' most acclaimed collections of short stories, is the first one published in 1974 by Pleias publishers, simultaneously with *El informe de Brodie* by Eksantas publications and followed, a year afterwards, by an anthology of short stories containing selected texts from the collections *Historia universal de la infamia*, *Historia de la eternidad*, *Ficciones*, *El aleph*, *el hacedor* and *Elogio de la sombra* by Ermis publications. The Borgesian flame is thereby kindled and leads to multiple editions of his works by various publishing companies during the decades of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. We will examine these publications in detail in the second chapter.

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<sup>9</sup> A. Sainis, 'Fates of Borges in Greece', *The Newspaper of the Editors*, 8 December 2013 <https://www.efsyn.gr/?p=157313> (10 July, 2014).



## 1.2. *The Greek contextual field*

We have mentioned just above that the publication of Borges works in complete, independent volumes begins in 1974, not so coincidentally a year crucial for Greek history. From 1967 to 1974, the Regime of the Colonels, a right-wing military formation that took power by force by subverting the legal government, has a partially stagnating effect on the Greek publishing industry. The field has already started to face problems after the first years of the 1960s, during which the dominant production titles are consumer books and non-literary titles, due to financial predicaments and social turbulences. This situation of crisis deteriorates with the occurrence of the coup d'état.<sup>10</sup> Despite the fact that many publishing companies continued to publish during the seven years of the military junta, their production is meagre and their publications confined by censorship. In addition to that, when deemed ideologically dangerous, many books are instantly being destroyed. As a corollary, the size of the book market is limited with the focus evolving around the political book.

However, as stated before, a small reading audience has already been moulded, mostly consisting of highly educated students and literati who are craving for books of liberal content that manage to evade censorship. With limited means at their disposal, Greek publishers struggle to meet the expectations of this audience and further shape its preferences, but succeed in doing so satisfactorily only after 1974. The emergence of new publishing houses is then observed, which have as the centre of attention not only the political but also the literary book. As Esplen observes, the contemporary Greek publishing industry is to an impressive degree new; many leading companies are created, transformed or adjusted after the end of the Junta in 1974.<sup>11</sup> Alongside with the re-establishment of democracy, these publishers respond –or attempt to respond- to their audience's thirst for information, education, political dialogue and cultural enhancement. The foundation of important publishing companies of an initially medium size, such as

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<sup>10</sup> C. Mpanou, *Gutenberg's next step. The publishing companies in Greece in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (Athens: Papazisis, 2012), p.105.

<sup>11</sup> M. Esplen, 'The Greek book market: Greek familiar values', *The Bookseller*, 23 August 2002 [www.theBookseller.com](http://www.theBookseller.com) (10 June, 2014).

Kastaniotis, Agra, Patakis and Nefeli, carries on until the first years of 1980s, reshaping the publishing field by the addition of new players or by the structural solidification of the already existing ones; a publishing orgasm takes place in terms of title production.<sup>12</sup>

What is really going on is a conscious attempt to educate and awaken, while simultaneously covering bibliographic gaps by publishing both national intellectuals and authors from abroad. Literature – principally Greek poetry or literary prose in translation, even if not always of the best quality- becomes the dominant product of the Greek publishing field and since then holds steady well into the twenty-first century.

It is exactly within this framework of an increasing need to exit this sphere of intellectual introversion and to reach to foreign modes of thinking that Borges' *Ficciones* is published in 1974 by Pleias publishing house, simultaneously with *El informe de Brodie* by Eksantas publications and followed by the anthology of short stories by Ermis. All these three initial publications consist of fictional short stories; this fact is also important, as genre is a crucial component in the marketplace and literary fiction has just started to gain ground.<sup>13</sup> Simultaneously, Borges, already worldwide recognized, corresponds to the aspiration of an educated, initiated elite to become acquainted with fresh and avant-garde literature.

Returning to the history of the Greek publishing field, the upward trend initiated in 1974 reaches its peak during the decade of the 1990s. Indicatively, according to a research carried out by UNESCO in Greece, the number of published new titles grows steadily from 1.068 in 1950, to 1.575 in 1960, 2.027 in 1970, 4.048 in 1980, 4.651 in 1985, 5.795 in 1998, 6.358 in 1999, and 7.070 in 2000.<sup>14</sup> This amplification is in accordance with the gradual improvement of educational level and income, and with a subsequent gradual growth –but never to a large extent- of the reading audience.

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<sup>12</sup> Mpanou, *Gutenberg's next step*, p.107.

<sup>13</sup> Squires, *Marketing Literature*, p.70.

<sup>14</sup> Kabouropoulos, 'The Greek book market 1974-1999', n.pag.

Keeping this flourishing in mind, during which the new small and average publishers initially struggle to shape their identity, we may nevertheless acknowledge that the Greek publishing industry has always remained of a relative small-scale in comparison with the rest of Europe, with a relatively small number of title production and with its general inclination being the familial model of enterprises, with many publishers operating à la Louis XIV. The reasons for this state of affairs have been explained in the introduction; these conditions, hand in hand with the absence of a broad target audience, deem the number of copies and sales of Borges books in Greece which will be presented later on as elevated.

Lastly, in addition to these features which persist well into the twenty-first century, most Greek publishing houses specialise in literature, prefer the publication of paperbacks and possess at least one bookshop under their brand. From 1975 onwards, many small-scale publishers have survived through the decades despite adversities, contributing to the polyphony of the Greek publishing field.<sup>15</sup>

### *1.3. Acquaintance of the Greek readers with similar writing*

Despite the fact that, according to one of the publishers interviewed, ‘Borges does not fall from the sky in the head of the Greek readers’,<sup>16</sup> implying with this phrase the gradual initiation of the audience in his work via literary magazines, it is indeed the case, admitted by all publishers, that the majority of Greek readers has not encountered anything similar before. Greece is traditionally considered a nation with a solid literary culture of poetry and a flimsy literary culture of prose; in addition to that, although a lot of Greek surrealist poets appear from the 1930s onwards, they are primarily affected by French surrealism and their writing style bears no resemblance at all to Borges’. Therefore there is definitely no question of Greek novelists or poets in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s writing in a similar fashion.

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<sup>15</sup> Kabouropoulos, ‘The Greek book market 1974-1999’, n.pag.

<sup>16</sup> Personal interview with mister Gavrielidis, publisher of Gavrielidis publishing company, 17 May 2014.

What does exist, however, although only after Borges' initial publications in 1974, 1975 and 1979, is a context of publications of a wave of Latin American authors in the 1980s. In 1983, *Octaedro* by Julio Cortázar sees the light of publication by Ypsilon publishing house, a publishing company that has been consistently importing quality foreign literature in Greece since the 1980s. In 1988, Cortázar's famous novel *Rayuela* is also published by Eksantas publishing company. Both these publishing houses are the initiators of Borges' literature in Greece. On the other hand, the also Argentinian Adolfo Bioy Casares remains relatively unknown.

But the principal figure conveying Latin American literature in Greece is indisputably Gabriel García Márquez. Multiple publications of his works appear in the decade of the 1980s; *Los funerales de la mamá grande* and *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* are both published in 1982 by two different publishers. *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*, *Ojos de perro azul*, *Muerte constante mas alla del amor*, *Cien años de soledad*, *La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y de su abuela desalmada* and many more of his works are simultaneously published in 1983, and more editions follow in the years to come. His constant presence in the next decades as the exalted representative of both Latin American authors and the literary movement of magical realism has a two-fold, somewhat contradictory inference, also evinced by many Greek publishers: firstly, that the Greek readers are not unaware of the concept of Latin American literature and its implications; secondly, that since Márquez and his *Cien años* was the 'must read' book in order to experience the Latin American magical realism, Borges' translated books end up manifesting themselves primarily not as Latin American, nor surreal; but simply as *Borgesian*. We will return to this point in the second chapter.

In conclusion, although Borges is published before Márquez, the average reader has more affinity with the latter and the connotations Márquez's name carries. According to Dimitris Kalokyris, an eminent translator and poet who plays a significant role in transmitting Borgesian literature in Greece, despite the fact that Borges is the first of the Latin American authors to be published, during the 1970s he is only known to a reading

elite, aware of his presence either by literary magazines or by the short-length book publications of his works mentioned above.<sup>17</sup>

What is of interest, however, is that from early on fragments of Borges are frequently inscribed in imported forms of art, namely cinema, and presented in the Greek audience in an underground way, probably not distinguished by the average audience. Specifically, in the film *Alphaville* (1965) by Jean-Luc Godard, the opening quote is from Borges' essay 'Nueva refutación del tiempo'; in the film *Performance* (1970) by Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg, the protagonist Mick Jagger utters a phrase from the same book and a portrait of Borges on a book cover is also displayed; lastly, the screenplay of *Spider's Stratagem* (1970) by the director Bernardo Bertolluci is based on Borges' short story 'Tema del traidor y del héroe'.

Inevitably, the directors of these films are heavily influenced by Borges not only in the way of external references, but also in terms of cinematic form and plot content. The films are projected in Greek movie theatres at the time. The question that remains -and the answer to which we can only approximately guess- is how many Greek people would be interested in watching a Godard or a Bertolluci film at that time; the answer would probably be the same as today: not many. It is however more than probable, as stated by Kalokyris, that many of those who choose to do so would simultaneously be in position to discern and appreciate the Borgesian germ found in them.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Personal interview with mister Kalokyris, translator, 20 May 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Personal interview with mister Kalokyris, translator, 20 May 2014.

## Chapter 2

### 2.1. Book publications

Multiple publications of Borges' books meet the publishing light of Greece. In particular, thirty-two of his books are published from 1974 to 2014 by thirteen different publishers; in addition to that, seven books of secondary literature about Borges' oeuvre are published in translation by six different publishing houses. Only the first category regarding Borges' translated texts in independent volumes will preoccupy us in this part. Due to the large number of publications, we will not delve into each one of the editions; instead, we will contemplate on most of them in a generic way and examine in depth only the most significant and influential. Interviews with as many of Borges publishers as possible have taken place; unfortunately some of the publishers were unwilling to contribute to this paper with their cooperation. Copies and sales figures will be provided where possible.

As it has already been mentioned, the 1970s is the decade in which Borges' books are initially published in Greece; in 1974, Pleias publishing house brings into the open *Ficciones*, Borges' most famous corpus of short stories, in a translation by Vaggelis Katsanis. However, this translation is not directly from Spanish, but derivative of an English translation of *Ficciones* published by Grove Press in 1962.<sup>19</sup> The Greek paperback edition, of 264 pages and a 21,5 x 14,5 cm size, incorporates a short biography of Borges, a photograph of his face and a photograph of his hands, as well as an image in colour from the cover of a French *Ficciones* edition published by Gallimard. The book cover is also adopted from the Grove Press edition and features a design conceived by the American graphic designer Roy Kuhlman.

Simultaneously with this edition, Eksantas publishing company publishes another famous Borgesian collection of short stories entitled *El informe de Brodie*, in a paperback edition of 104 pages and a size of 19,8 x 13 cm. In the book cover the painting

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<sup>19</sup> V. Pavlidis., 'Library of Jorge Luis Borges' Greek publications', *Borgesgr.blogspot*, 12 October 2006 <http://borgesgr.blogspot.nl/> (02 July, 2014).

*Las Ilusiones* (1944) by the Mexican painter Diego Rivera is featured. In this case, the translation emerges directly from Spanish by two female translators, Kleio Daveli and Xrysa Tsamadou. Not much is known about the translators or about the print runs; however, after a short phone interview with one of Eksantas employees, it appears that in this case as well all the copies sell out.<sup>20</sup>

In 1975, Ermis publishing house prints an anthology of short stories containing selected texts from the collections *Historia universal de la infamia*, *Historia de la eternidad*, *Ficciones*, *El aleph*, *El hacedor* and *Elogio de la sombra*. 2.000 copies are printed and sell out, and two reprints follow of 4.700 copies in total, which are again depleted.<sup>21</sup> The editions per se are slightly unattractive; they comprise of 208 pages books of 21 x 14,5 cm, with obsolete typography even for their era and a tasteless orange labyrinth as a cover featuring Borges' name. The translation by Katia Wilson originates from the English language. No introduction or Borges' biographical note are included. The translation per se is not without faults, one of its critiques being the observation that the Spanish names are rendered incorrectly into the target language.

The successive publication of Borges in 1979 by Domos publishing house constitutes a particular case; under the title *Anthology*, poems and prose texts are selected from the collections *Ficciones*, *El aleph*, *El hacedor*, *Otras inquisiciones* and *El otro, el mismo*. However, as the publisher, mister Mavropoulos states, the selection is made after consulting Borges himself; the translator Labros Kaberidis approaches Mavropoulos and convinces him to publish Borges. Kaberidis afterwards contacts Borges and his Argentinian publishing company, Editorial Sur, and Borges interferes in choosing the texts for the Greek anthology.<sup>22</sup> 2.000 copies are printed and sell out in a fine, minimal

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<sup>20</sup> Phone interview with misses Velentza, employee of Eksantas publishing company, 18 May 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Interview via mail with mister Christophoridis, publisher of Ermis publishing company, 19 May 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Personal interview with mister Mavropoulos, publisher of Domos publishing company, 16 May 2014.

edition of 288 pages and an average size of 21 x 14,5 cm. However, the translation – directly from Spanish – is criticized negatively, once again because the Spanish proper names of the texts are transliterated poorly in Greek.

Despite his different focus as a publisher, which we will examine later on, Mavropoulos is inclined to reprint Borges' works, as the first edition sells out. However, immediately after Borges' death in 1986, Domos is legally prosecuted by Ypsilon publishing house, which has by then bought all the translational rights of the Latin American author. So far, until the decade of the 1980s the framework of Borges' rights in Greece is more than vague; it is doubtful if Pleias, Eksantas, and Ermis had any right to publish the Argentinian.

However, in 1980 Ypsilon publishing house lawfully activates the publication of Borges throughout the 1980s and remains the author's dominant publisher in Greece until 1991. Under the title *The Creator and other texts*, a small book with selected short stories from *Ficciones*, *El aleph*, *El hacedor* and *El libro de arena* comprises the first publication of Ypsilon's publisher, mister Charmanis. The edition consists of 88 pages and a size of 18 x 11 cm; as a cover, it hosts a classic black and white photograph of Borges holding his cane. The translators of the edition are Nikos Karouzos and Dimitris Kalokyris. Karouzos (1926-1990), three-times winner of the National Poetry Award (1963, 1972, 1988) is an important Greek poet and translator; however, in this particular edition his translation is indirect and originates from the French. Kalokyris, whose key role will soon be apparent, translates from the Spanish original texts but with the aid of French and English translations. The edition also contains a timetable with the most important dates of Borges' life, some photographs and two introductory notes by both translators.

This publication detonates a consistent importation of Borges in Greece by Ypsilon, which successfully carries the weight of transmitting the works of the Latin American author in Greece until 1991. The consecutive Borgesian editions throughout the decade are marked by their elegant yet minimal typographical style and book design and are



characterized as ‘collectable and bibliophile works’.<sup>23</sup> These editions follow the same rationale of the first venture of the publishing house and constitute short-length books with valuable annotations; the publications vary from 88 to 192 pages, without never exceeding the latter number, and always have the addition of either an introduction and/or an essay and a commentary by the translator to induct the non-initiated reader.

The Borgesian publications of Ypsilon are also recognizable by their cover. The frame of the cover is always silver. The full name of the author is printed in large letters on top; underneath, photographs of Borges, designs of Kalokyris or paintings of Salvador Dali are the kind of images most frequently featured. Under the images, the title of the book is displayed in a smaller font and in a different colour, and beneath it the name of the translator in an even smaller font.

Despite the fact that throughout the 1980s the bulk of the translated and published material continues to be Borges’ short stories and, secondarily, poetry, three distinct kinds of publications also meet the light of publication under the imprint of Ypsilon. In 1982, the first bilingual edition appears, presenting side by side the two short stories ‘La Rosa de Paracelso’ and ‘Tigres azules’ and their Greek translation by Achilleas Kyriakidis. The volume consists of 104 pages and is of a 21 x 13 cm size; along with the text, many drawings of the Mexican designer Alfredo Gonzalez are included and thematically fit with the stories. The cover design is also by Gonzalez. The edition, which sells out and is reprinted in 1986, includes an introduction of the translator in which he justifies his translational choices as well as commentaries to the two short stories.

The second simultaneous publications that differ also occur in 1982; for the first time, 10 essays of Borges are translated and published under the title *The transformations of the turtle*, along with 3 short stories. The essays are chosen from Borges’ books *Discussion*, *Historia universal de la infamia*, *Historia de la eternidad*, *Ficciones*, *El aleph*,

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<sup>23</sup> A. Sainis., ‘Fates of Borges in Greece’, *The Newspaper of the Editors*, 8 December 2013 <https://www.efsyn.gr/?p=157313> (10 July, 2014).

*Otras inquisiciones* and *Elogio de la sombra*. The edition consists of 128 pages and is of a 18 x 11 cm size. The cover, in which Borges' face is on display, is once again designed by Kalokyris. The translator is Chourmouziadis, who as we have mentioned before, was a systematic translator of Borges in literary magazines. The translations per se are accurate; the philosophical views of Borges are well-articulated to the non-expert reader. Simultaneously, the Borgesian idiom does not transpire as oversimplified and maintains its vigour. An introductory study by Chourmouziadis, entitled 'Jorge Luis Borges (a magician of speech)' is also included in the volume. Hand in hand with that, Kyriakidis also translates for Ypsilon *Historia de la eternidad*, a collection of essays regarding various topics. The book cover features a design of the Spanish graphic designer Daniel Gil. The volume comprises of 192 pages and is of a 21 x 13 cm size. All copies sell out and there is a reprint in 1985. Kyriakidis does not limit himself in simply translating the essays; he adds commentaries in each of them in order to sufficiently explain Borges' frames of reference and delineates the first 'Draft of Borges' bibliography' encountered in Greece. The draft covers most of Borges' book publications so far and provides a useful aid to the Borgesian researcher.

The third novel publication under the imprint of Ypsilon occurs in 1984 and is a translation of the collaborative work of Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares entitled *Seis problemas para Don Isidro Parodi* (1942). The genre is detective stories and was never in the past connected with Borges in the Greek literary *locus*. Casares (1914-1999), a distinguished Argentinian fiction writer and a friend of Borges, creates along with the latter six detective stories which initiate with the appearance of a main character who is confronted with a murder mystery that requires his skills to be unravelled. The Greek volume is of 192 pages and once again of an average size of 21 x 13 cm. The cover design is once again a creation of Kalokyris featuring Borges' face. Kyriakidis translates the texts and supplements them with an introductory note and commentary. In addition, in the edition a prologue of the initial publication of the book in 1942 by Gervasio Montenegro of the Argentine Academy of Letters is incorporated.

At this point we may address another important contribution of Ypsilon publishing house which resides in contracting Kalokyris and Kyriakidis as translators for most of

Borges' books. Dimitris Kalokyris and Achilleas Kyriakidis are the two protagonists of the Borgesian fusion in Greece. Both of them learn Spanish just for the sake of translating the Argentinian author, after having read him in English and French respectively.<sup>24</sup> These scholars -being far from random in the Greek literary landscape- hold a unique place in constructing the Greek-Latin American literary relationships.

Kalokyris (1948,-) has studied Modern Greek Philology in Thessaloniki and founded the literary magazines *Tram* (1971-1987) and *Map* (1982-1987). A writer, a distinguished translator and a poet, in 1996 he wins the National Short Stories Award for his fictitious novel *The discovery of Homer*.<sup>25</sup> In 2013 he is elected president of the National Company of Authors. Achilleas Kyriakidis (1946,-) has studied Economical Studies in Athens. He has published nine books of short stories and essays and is the screen writer and director of three movies. His translations, always of a high quality, cover a wide spectrum of contemporary authors such as Jorge Luis Borges, Georges Perec, Luis Sepúlveda, Andrew Crumey and many more. Kyriakidis has been awarded four notable awards: the National Short Stories Award for his novel *Artificial breathing* (2004), the National Translational Award for the translation of the collected prose works of Borges (2006), the International Cavafy Translational Award for his overall contribution (2007) and the Literary Translation of French Literature Award for his Greek translation of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* by Patrick Modiano.<sup>26</sup>

These scholars are fascinated by Borges' literature; throughout the years, their translations for Ypsilon reveal a unique understanding of Borges special dialect, as years

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<sup>24</sup> L. Kouzeli, 'Re-reading Jorge Luis Borges: Re-publishing the collective works of the Argentinian writer in the tested translations of Dimitris Kalokyris and Achilleas Kyriakidis', *The Step*, 2 February 2014 <http://www.tovima.gr/books-ideas/article/?aid=562808> (10 July,2014).

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.biblionet.gr/author/5816/%CE%94%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%AE%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B7%CF%82\\_%CE%9A%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%BF%CE%BA%CF%8D%CF%81%CE%B7%CF%82](http://www.biblionet.gr/author/5816/%CE%94%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%AE%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B7%CF%82_%CE%9A%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%BF%CE%BA%CF%8D%CF%81%CE%B7%CF%82) (10 July, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.biblionet.gr/author/2493/%CE%91%CF%87%CE%B9%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%AD%CE%B1%CF%82\\_%CE%9A%CF%85%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%AF%CE%B4%CE%B7%CF%82](http://www.biblionet.gr/author/2493/%CE%91%CF%87%CE%B9%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%AD%CE%B1%CF%82_%CE%9A%CF%85%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%AF%CE%B4%CE%B7%CF%82) (10 July, 2014).

of struggling with the Argentinian's verse and prose teach them how to articulate Borges' both writing flow and essence. The Ypsilon editions realized under their supervision constitute publications that enhance the original text and add valuable information in the form of introductions and commentaries.

Despite the fact that Ypsilon has acquired the official legal rights to publish Borges in Greece, four more significant publications appear before 1991, two of them possibly illegal. In 1982, Nefeli publishing house prints the collection of short stories *El libro de arena*, probably without a contract with Borges' agent or publishing house. Some of the stories are already published by Ypsilon. Unfortunately, the publisher of Nefeli refused to accept an interview to provide us with more information and enlighten the topic. However, we do know that the edition is based on a translation by Spyros Tsaknias which originates from the English language, specifically from Penguin's *The book of sand* edition (1989). Tsaknias (1929-1999), a literary critic, translator, poet and novelist, makes a decent effort to render the rudimentary meaning of the texts, but in my opinion fails to attribute any secondary connotations e.g. in the form of explanatory footnotes. His introductory note in the beginning is also accurate, but exhausts itself in biographical events of Borges' life. The publication per se consists of 136 pages and a size of 21 x 13,5 cm; the cover page once again features Borges' face. The number of copies is unknown, but they must have sold out, as two reprints follow.

The second illegal publication occurs in the same year by Erato publishing house. The collection of short stories *Historia universal de la infamia*, already multiply published in Greece, is translated by Aggeliki Manousaki and Minas Grigoratos and comprises of 136 pages and a size of 19,5 x 12 cm. The somewhat tasteless cover displays an artistic composition of a female hand wearing a golden bracelet and touching a wine glass. Besides a prologue of Borges which is taken from the original publication of *Historia* in Argentina in 1935, the edition does not incorporate any introduction or commentary. The circulation is 2.500 copies which sell out within few months. There are no reprints.

Both the translators are relatively unknown. However, Aggeliki Manousaki, who also creates the cover design, is the sister of the publisher, mister Manousakis. In an interview with mister Manousakis, he attests that the translation received negative critiques. His

view with regard to translational rights is interesting, to say the least: ‘no, we had no rights of Borges. At the time it was not necessary to have rights in order to publish a foreign writer.’<sup>27</sup> As manifested before, this elasticity towards the legal translational rights of Borges is not uncommon for some Greek publishers.

The third publication that comes to circulation during the 1980s and eludes the aegis of Ypsilon was *El libro de los seres imaginarios* (1957), a fantastic encyclopaedia of mythical beasts from literature and folklore tales, written by Borges and Margarita Guerrero. The publishing house Libro acquires the foreign rights solely for this specific title –previously unpublished in Greece- from Borges’ agent during the Frankfurt Book Fair.<sup>28</sup> As a result, in 1983 the book is published in Greece under the imprint of Libro in an edition of 220 pages and a size of 21 x 13 cm. The cover design features a fantastic monster and is a creation of Kalokyris. An introductory note with Borges’ biographical information by the translator and a prologue by the writers taken from the original publication of the Argentinian Emece Editores S.A publishing house in 1957 are included. A practical index with names, place names and other points of reference is also added. The translation -made by Giorgos Veis (1955,-) a distinguished diplomat, literary critic and poet- is of a high quality; despite the fact that it is indirect and derives from the English language, the strenuous descriptive terms as well as the subtle humorous sense of the original are accurately transpired. The first publication is of 3.000 copies and sells out; 3 reprints follow, of 1.000 copies each, and are also depleted.

The fourth significant publication that meets the light of publicity during the 1980s is the philosophical essay of Borges and Alicia Jurado entitled ‘¿Qué es el budismo?’. As evinced by its title, the essay examines the religion of Buddhism and originates from Borges’ lecture on a conference in 1976. The Greek edition of 1988 is under the imprint of Roes publishing house and emerges after an agreement with Borges’ literary agent. The edition comprises of 144 pages and a size of 18,5 x 11,5 cm. As a cover, a

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<sup>27</sup> Personal interview with mister Manousakis, publisher of Erato publishing company, 13 May 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Personal interview with mister Panteleskos, publisher of Libro publishing company, 20 May 2014.

psychedelic design of interwoven circles is displayed, by an unknown creator. The translator, E.K.Gazis, is also unknown. A general evaluation of the translation – which is easily comprehended- reveals that the flow of the speech is consistent and the philosophical concepts remain faithful to the original. An introductory note by Alicia Jurado is included. 2.000 copies are printed and sell out, and two reprints follow, of 1.000 copies each, which are also depleted.

Concurrently with the publications mentioned above, the publisher of Ypsilon, mister Charmanis, continues to publish Borges' works until 1991. From this year onwards, financial turbulences inhibit the further publication of the Latin American author. In the years to come, it becomes almost impossible to find Borges' works in Greek bookshops because the previous editions have sold out and no reprints or new publications are available. However, as Charmanis explains, in 2005 Ellinika Grammata publishing house -the history of which we will examine later on- is able to 'meet the increasing financial demands of Borges' agent'<sup>29</sup> and has simultaneously the means to provide a large title production. Ypsilon's responsible transmission and introduction of new genres of the Latin American's works inevitably ends and the translational rights of Borges are bought anew.

Ellinika Grammata, at that time the largest publishing company of Greece and now shut down as another sad corollary of the financial crisis, embarks upon publishing for the first time Borges' collective works. With three consecutive editions *Collective prose* (2005), *Poems* (2006) and *Essays* (2007), Borges' works become available to the Greek readers once again.

The cover in all three publications of Ellinika Grammata is the same. The background colour is white and Borges' name is displayed on the top; underneath it and in a much larger font the genre is featured as a title, e.g. essays. The name of the translator appears under the title in a smaller font and in a different typeface, and under that an image of a

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<sup>29</sup> Interview via mail with mister Charmanis, publisher of Ypsilon publishing company, 29 May 2014.

pair of hands carving Borges' name in a marble stone is displayed. On the side of the cover, the phrase 'Classic library' is included as the name of the series.

*Collective prose* encompasses all of Borges' short stories and comprises of 760 pages and a size of 24x17 cm. The translation, introduction and commentary is by Kyriakidis, who employs his former scattered translations for Ypsilon as a basis. Some of the translations are examined anew by the translator. In this edition, Kyriakidis inserts a brief introductory note; in there the Borgesian literary techniques are presented to the reader as well as the basic motifs employed by the Argentinian. Kyriakidis is awarded the National Translational Award for this edition. In the end of the book there is a bibliographical note, a dictionary of names and places, a glossary and many notes by the translator. The novelty of this edition resides in the fact that for the first time the short stories of Borges are available to the Greek reader in the form of a continuum; this is why one of the main appraisals of the book is that it enacts a cultural testimony of contemporary literature.

*Poems* is an edition of 302 pages and a size of 23 x 17 cm. Many of Borges' poems are included; Kalokyris, the translator and editor of the volume, explains that due to the limitation of size, some poems needed to be omitted; he therefore chose the poems that he deemed representative. Once again, some of the translations previously produced for Ypsilon are selected, but Kalokyris also translates previously unpublished poems. In the introduction, the translator specifies to the reader that the universe of Borges' poems can either be complementary or contradictory to the familiar fictitious structure encountered in Borges' prose. The quality of Kalokyris translations, that renders them in my opinion superior to any prior ventures, resides in his attempt to maintain the rhythm and form of the poems, while simultaneously successfully transpiring the meaning and its connotations.

*Essays*, of 798 pages and again of a 24 x 17 cm size, is a laborious work by Kyriakidis; it is a selection of ninety-three essays on various topics from nine different collections. The edition incorporates 1072 explanatory comments by the translator, an inventory of names, place names and titles, a dictionary of philosophical terms, an index, a glossary and a detailed bibliography. The edition aggregates Borges' essays with topics that oscillate between the wondrous and the external reality.

The basic advantage of these three publications is indisputably the high quality of the translations and the assemblage of Borges' works. Because Ellinika Grammata publishing house is closed, we could not retrieve any figures of copies and sales; however, four reprints take place and must have sold out. As a downside of these editions, we may mention the hefty and inconvenient size of the volumes that could potentially be unattractive to the readers.

However, in 2010 Ellinika Grammata publishing house closes down and for the second time it becomes increasingly difficult to encounter Borges' texts in the Greek book market, as all the publications have been depleted. It is only in 2014 when Patakis publishing house buys anew the Argentinian's translational rights from Borges' literary agent Andrew Wylie,<sup>30</sup> that Borges' works become again accessible to the Greek readers.

As Anna Pataki mentions in our interview, it was her personal dream to re-publish Borges.<sup>31</sup> Due to the fact that Patakis publishing company has increasingly been growing in size and capital, and also thanks to the financial boost from the publication of *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy by E.L.James, it becomes possible to acquire the translational rights of the Argentinian. Interestingly, the fact that the 'mommy porn' trilogy sold out more than 160.000 copies before the end of the 2012 is the contributing factor that enables Patakis to delve into the publication of Borges.

In 2014, *Collective prose* is put into circulation in two volumes. As Anna Pataki explains, the bulk of Borges' short stories is broken down in two volumes for usability reasons. The first volume consists of 598 pages and a size of 21x14 cm. The second volume is of the same size and consists of 486 pages. The cover page is the same in both; a large photograph of Borges by Ferdinando Scianna looking at a cloudy sky alongside

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<sup>30</sup> Personal interview with misses Pataki, publisher of Patakis publishing company, 19 May 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Personal interview with misses Pataki, publisher of Patakis publishing company, 19 May 2014.



with Borges' name in a very large font. Underneath it and in a much smaller font appear the title and the name of the translator, Kyriakidis.

In the beginning of the first volume there is a prologue of the translator and in the end of the second a bibliographical and a biographical note. The biographical note is not extensive but is included only as a secondary tool in order to shed light to aspects of the content. In the first volume, two prologues of Borges from *Historia universal de la infamia* from the 1935 edition of Editorial Tor publishing house and from the 1954 edition of Emecé publishing house are incorporated. Both volumes contain extensive notes, a glossary and a useful index of names, place names and titles of works.

Simultaneously with this edition, *Poems* are published in an edition of 304 pages and a size of 21 x14 cm. As a cover, another photograph of Borges' profile is displayed by Scianna. On the background a Roman statue is depicted. In a large typeface, the name of the author dominates the cover, and underneath it in a smaller typeface, appears the title and the name of the translator, Kalokyris. This edition is an anthology that Kalokyris formed gradually in 30 years' time. The personal acquaintance of the translator with Borges facilitated his approach. Poems from all of Borges' poetic collections are included in chronological order. *Poems* also contain an introduction with a brief informative biography. Scattered within the volume are photographs of Borges, sketches from his childhood and scanned images of his manuscripts. The selected poems are chosen either for historical or thematic reasons. An important factor is the thematic balance of the edition; there is a conscious attempt to represent all the different Borgesian poetic motifs. In addition, two poems previously unpublished in Greek are inserted, 'El hambre' and 'Soneto del vino'.

It is evident that both the prose and poetry editions derive respectively from Kyriakidis' and Kalokyris' translations for Ellinika Grammata. However, the two translators revise and enhance their previous work for the latest publications of Patakis. The aim of Anna Pataki is not only to re-publish Borges, but to create improved editions which would have an added value. In terms of form, the aesthetic aspect of the editions is delicate; the typesetting is elegant and the editing is flawless. In terms of content, Kyriakidis' award-winning translation is polished anew. Moreover, in *Poems* Kalokyris

edits the verses anew –admittedly with a note of freedom- in order to substitute the dense eleven-syllable lines with rhythmical free verses. Nevertheless, he does maintain the stanzas, the enjambments and the punctuation of the original.

For each of the prose volumes and for the poetry volume, the print run is 4.000 copies. The copies are still in circulation in bookshops, do well and are anticipated to sell out. However, as Anna Pataki explains in her interview, the bet is to keep Borges in a steady circulation in the catalogue for the years to come, both by reprints and by further publications of his essays and the texts he wrote in collaboration with others.<sup>32</sup> Considering the general circumstances of the financial crisis in Greece, and the specific circumstances of financial hardships for the Greek publishing landscape, it is indisputably a challenging bet. It is however of significance to maintain the interactivity of the young Greek readers with the classic works of Borges in the years to come.

## *2.2. Publishers and backlists*

The publishing companies which publish Borges can be separated in three categories: niche publishing houses of a small or a medium size that specialize in high quality literature, mainstream publishing companies of a small or a medium size with no specific vocation that publish general books and mainstream publishing companies of a large size that also have an all-embracing range of publications. In the third category pertain the two latest publishers of Borges in Greece, Ellinika Grammata and Patakis.

The first publisher of Borges, Pleias publishing house, fits into the backdrop we have introduced in chapter 1; after the change of the political regime in 1974 many innovative publishing houses are founded in order to meet the demands of the inquiring readers, but do not endure through time. Pleias, gone out of business many decades ago, is a small niche publishing house, novel for the Greek publishing landscape of the '70s in the sense that it promotes relatively unknown contemporary Greek and foreign prose books. As illustrated by Borges' publication, which is reprinted twice in 1980 and 1982, a venture to

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<sup>32</sup> Personal interview with misses Pataki, publisher of Patakis publishing company, 19 May 2014.

import foreign literature of quality and an attempt to follow the models of acclaimed foreign publishers is apparent.

Respectively with Pleias, Eksantas publishing company is also founded in 1974, as stated in its website, ‘immediately after the restoration of democracy.’<sup>33</sup> The decision to publish Borges originates from the publisher’s, Magda Kotzia, desire to initiate Greek readers to Latin American literature.<sup>34</sup> Eksantas specializes in foreign literature, Greek literature, fine arts and philosophy. Despite its small size and very limited title production, the company has survived and has contributed significantly in the promotion of Latin American literature in Greece. Indicatively, under the imprint of Eksantas, *Dias y noches de amor y guerra* from Eduardo Galeano is published in 1978, , *Los pasos perdidos* by Alejo Carpentier in 1983 as well as various books by Julio Cortázar, Ernesto Sabato and Mario Vargas Llosa.

As opposed to the previous cases, Ermis constitutes a mainstream publishing house of an average size which does not specialize in any similar kind of literature. Established in 1969, throughout the decades many different genres have been published under its imprint such as poetry, plays, literature, scrapbooks, cook books and children books.<sup>35</sup> As the publisher, mister Christophoridis comments, the publication of Borges in 1975 takes place in a framework of exploration, during which the publishing company struggles to form its own identity.<sup>36</sup> Ermis has not had any particular focus on surrealism, magical realism, Latin American writing or even literature. According to the publisher, Borges is

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.exandasbooks.gr/> (10 July, 2014).

<sup>34</sup> Phone interview with misses Velentza, employee of Eksantas publishing company, 18 May 2014.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.ermis-ekdotiki.gr/hermestypelist.asp> (10 July, 2014).

<sup>36</sup> Interview via mail with mister Christophoridis, publisher of Ermis publishing company, 19 May 2014.

published solely because Christophoridis himself believes in the artistic power and value of the text.

Funnily enough, the following publisher, mister Mavropoulos, owner of Domos, pursues a very specific publishing target, in relation to which the decision to publish Borges seems somewhat deviant. Mavropoulos sets up the publishing company in order to particularly print books of orthodox theology and works of Alexandros Papadiamantis, a Greek naturalistic author of the nineteenth century who explores the religious-mystical aspect of provincial life in his novels. However, coincidentally Borges' *Anthology* in 1979 is the first book ever published by Domos publishing house, founded in 1979. The decision to publish Borges is spontaneous; Mavropoulos, who has studied Social Theology in Athens, is already aware of the Argentinian's work and is impressed by the elements of Eastern religions fused there.<sup>37</sup> In addition to that, the translator, Kaberidis, contacts Borges' publishing company in Argentina, Editorial Sur, consults Borges in the formulation of the anthology and convinces Mavropoulos to publish the Latin American. Mavropoulos judges Borges' works to be of a literary genius, an amalgamation of surrealism, theology and philosophy.<sup>38</sup> However, the following title production of Domos -very limited due to its small size- is confined throughout the decades on works of religious philosophy, theology and Papadiamantis.

The main publishing house of Borges in Greece during the 1980s is Ypsilon. In terms of financial capital and title production, it was and still remains of a medium size. Nevertheless, the particular publishing house has accumulated significant symbolic capital due to the beautiful aesthetic design of the editions and, most importantly, due to the backlist it has formulated. For many decades now, Ypsilon encompasses a wide range of authors from worldwide. Indicatively, we mention here *Poésies I et II* (1983) by Lautreamont and *Sevdali bulut* (1988) by Nazim Hikmet in the poetry genre, *Tristan* and

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<sup>37</sup> Personal interview with mister Mavropoulos, publisher of Domos publishing company, 16 May 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Personal interview with mister Mavropoulos, publisher of Domos publishing company, 16 May 2014.

*Tonio Kröger* (1985) by Thomas Mann and *The Waves* (1986) by Virginia Woolf in the literary prose genre, as well as multiple publications of Kastoriadis, Habermas, Adorno and Merleau-Ponty during the 1980s and the 1990s in the philosophy genre. More pertinent to our research, in the 1980s *Traité du style* (1985) and *Le paysan de Paris* (1986) by Louis Aragon are published as well as *Nadja* (1981) by André Breton. Many Greek surrealist poets also find a place in Ypsilon. In addition to these works, *Octaedro* by Julio Cortázar is published in 1983.

As the publisher, mister Charmanis informs us, Borges is not published primarily for being a representative of Latin American literature; the main reason for his publication derives from exactly this initiative to acquaint the Greek audience, which has just stopped experiencing the intellectual stagnation of the military Junta, with many innovative literary movements such as surrealism, Dadaism, and fantastic literature. Combined with this inclination, there is a conscious effort to embrace literature of high quality from all around the world under its imprint.<sup>39</sup> We may also note that Charmanis has been consistent in representing a polyphony of classic or contemporary authors well into the 2000s. Some of the latest publications of Ypsilon include works of George Bataille, Alberto Savinio, Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva, Georges Perec, Michel Foucault and Samuel Beckett.

A publishing house which realizes a singular publication of Borges in a possibly illegal context is Nefeli. Of an average size, Nefeli is also founded in 1979. Nefeli's titles cover a wide range of subjects such as Greek and foreign fiction, poetry, literary theory and criticism, art, music, theatre, philosophy, history, linguistics, sociology, psychoanalysis and children's literature. In the Greek book market, Nefeli publishing house is distinguished for its quality, both in terms of production techniques and with regard to the choice and editing of the texts. Unfortunately, as mentioned before the publisher mister Douvitsas refused to be interviewed and provide us with further information. However, we deduce that Borges fits generically into the company's

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<sup>39</sup> Interview via mail with mister Charmanis, publisher of Ypsilon publishing company, 29 May 2014.

backlist, as there is a specialization in translations of classic and contemporary literature. Indicatively, some of the authors translated and published in 2012 are Fernando Pessoa, Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke, Bertolt Brecht and Albert Camus. Douvitsas has also brought to the light of publicity *Los funerales de la mamá grande* (1982), *Ojos de perro azul* (1983), *Muerte constante más allá del amor* (1983) and *Relato de un naufrago* (1983) by Gabriel García Márquez; however, it is doubtful whether there is any specific focus on Latin American literature or on literature of magical realism. It is more probable that, as it has happened before, Borges is published because his writings are regarded as part of the global literary heritage; in particular, as works of the canon.

Another publishing house that makes an exclusive publication of Borges in 1982 is Erato. It is a small publishing house that mainly publishes literature but is not specialized in any specific literary genre. From Raymond Chandler's collection of detective stories entitled *The simple art of murder* (1982), to Nabokov's *Lolita* (1984), to William Blake's *The book of Thel* (2003), to Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The curious case of Benjamin Button* (2009), we ascertain the publisher's, mister Manousakis assurance that the literary genre or the era does not preoccupy him; he is 'merely interested in publishing what deserves to be published, and that is quality books'.<sup>40</sup> What becomes obvious by examining Erato's backlist, and can be justified by the very limited financial capital of the company, is that there is certainly a preference in authors who have deceased more than 70 years ago so there are no copyright restrictions or need to acquire translational rights. What Manousakis detects in Borges that urges him to publish the Argentinian, is the underground blend of the indigenous tradition of Latin American culture with the Spanish literary heritage.<sup>41</sup> It is exactly this element, in combination with Borges' tendency to fuse history and fiction which afterwards leads Manousakis to publish

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<sup>40</sup> Personal interview with mister Manousakis, publisher of Erato publishing company, 13 May 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Personal interview with mister Manousakis, publisher of Erato publishing company, 13 May 2014.

*Cuentos fantásticos* (1983) by Rubén Darío (1867-1916), a pioneer of Spanish-American modernism and an early predecessor of magical realism.

Moving on, in 1983, Libro publishing house publishes *El libro de los seres imaginarios*, the rights for which the publisher Dimitris Panteleskos has acquired from Borges' agent in Frankfurt Book Fair.<sup>42</sup> Libro is founded in 1979 and is a mainstream company of a small size; under its imprint general books, literature, cook books, biographies, scrapbooks, architecture and history books are published. The financial crisis has reduced the title production and has led in an investment in a Libro bookshop as a possible way of revenue. From the 1990s, Libro publishes all genres indiscriminately but, as it is understandable, in a very small scale. However, it appears that during the 1980s the company promotes a series of contemporary foreign literature in translation which includes *Die stimmen von Marrakesch* (1983) by Elias Canetti, *Génie la folle* (1984) by Inès Cagnati and *Pincher Martin* (1984) by William Golding; the publication of Borges is incorporated in this series. As the son of Dimitris Panteleskos and current owner of the company, Petros Panteleskos, explains, the initiative to publish Borges emerges from this desire to bring out a small spectrum of twentieth century authors from worldwide; Borges is chosen not as an author of fantastic literature, nor as a Latin American author. He is chosen for being Borges, as a writer worth-publishing for his literary virtue.<sup>43</sup>

One of the following publications is *¿Qué es el budismo?* by Roes publishing house in 1988. As mentioned before, the book constitutes a philosophical essay of Borges on Buddhism. The publisher, Andreas Kartakis, runs a niche publishing company of a medium size with two imprints, Roes and Printa. As mister Karatzas, one of the employees of Roes, states in our interview, Kartakis has an international orientation as a

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<sup>42</sup> Personal interview with mister Panteleskos, publisher of Libro publishing company, 20 May 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Personal interview with mister Panteleskos, publisher of Libro publishing company, 20 May 2014.

publisher.<sup>44</sup> With a small annual title production, the editions of Roes are since its foundation integrated in series. The most acclaimed series are the ‘classics’, which contain translated works by Cervantes, Dostoyevsky, Fitzgerald, Mark Twain, Anton Chekhov and others; the ‘poetry’ series, which contain anthologies of poems by T. S. Eliot, Fernando Pessoa, Anne Sexton and others; and the ‘fountains of knowledge’ series in which philosophical essays by various authors and on various topics are incorporated. It is in the context of this series that *¿Qué es el budismo?* is published. In the framework of ‘fountains of knowledge’, *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos* (1993) by Miguel de Unamuno, *Die Zukunft einer Illusion* (2003) by Sigmund Freud, *Zur Farbenlehre* (2008) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *La deshumanización del arte* (2011) by José Ortega y Gasset, as well as multiple works of Immanuel Kant are published among others. We therefore deduce that in this case, Borges is not published as a fiction author, but he is associated with a group of literati from different backgrounds who reflect on philosophical issues through their essays.

After the above mentioned scattered publications and the simultaneous consecutive publications of Ypsilon, there is a gap in the transmission of Borges in Greece from 1991 to 2005. It is during this year when Ellinika Grammata attempts to publish the collective works of Borges for the first time in Greece (2005-2007). Ellinika Grammata, founded in 1947 by Dimitris Papachristofilou and then inherited by his son Pavlos Papachristofilou, is one of the oldest publishing houses of the country. The company is initially oriented to children’s books, Greek and foreign literature, reference books and college textbooks. Throughout the decades, the size of the company grows significantly and in the dawn of the 2000s Ellinika Grammata turns into the largest publishing company of the country. With an undisguised mainstream policy, the company’s number and spectrum of publications is infinite for the Greek publishing *status quo*; children’s books such as *The reptile room* (2002) by Lemony Snicket and *Une journée avec Winnie I' Ourson* (2003) by Kathleen Zoehfeld, textbooks such as *Presocratic philosophy. A very short*

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<sup>44</sup> Personal interview with mister Karatzas, employee of Roes publishing company, 20 May 2014.



*introduction* (2006) by Catherine Osborne (copyrighted from Oxford University Press), detective books such as *Trouble is my business* (2004) by Raymond Chandler as well as consumer books, books on philosophy, religion, geography, science, cookery, astrology, sports and social studies are published indiscriminately. The title production is huge, and no distinction is made based on the genre, author or quality of the books. Hand in hand with consumer books and many trash Greek novels, books such as *Death in summer* (2005) by William Trevor and *Orlando* (2005) by Virginia Woolf are published in a series called ‘Classic library’; it is in the context of this series that Borges is published.

The story of Ellinika Grammata is a sad one; in 2007, the Media Group Lamprakis buys the publishing company and transforms it into a branch of its media corporation. Initially, this action gives a further boost to the financial capital of the publishing house and enables the continuance of the enormous amount of titles produced; however, suddenly in 2010, Lamprakis announces the closing of Ellinika Grammata, ostensibly as a corollary of the financial crisis described in the introduction. The obscure reason presented as an excuse is that the company is financially unsustainable. This event provokes a scandal, as more than a hundred people lose their jobs out of the blue. The – still unanswered- question is why the largest and most profitable publishing house in Greece starts facing financial problems right after it is bought out by the Media Group Lamprakis. Is that merely a coincidence?

The answer to this question is, of course, irrelevant to the present paper. What is of relevance is that with the closing of Ellinika Grammata in 2010, Borges’ texts become once again unavailable to the Greek readers as all the collective editions have sold out. It is in 2014 that Patakis publishing house buys the translational rights anew and proceeds with the latest publication of Borges in Greece.

Patakis publishing company is founded in 1974 and is currently the largest publishing house of Greece. From its establishment until 1991 the publications that appear under its imprint are school aid books and children’s books. From 1992 onwards, the genres of contemporary Greek and foreign literature are added to its scope; indicatively, we mention here the editions *Of mice and men* (1996) by John Steinbeck, *Il conformista* (2000) by Alberto Moravia, *On Chesil beach* (2007) by Ian McEwan and *Hugh Selwyn*

*Mauberley* (2010) by Ezra Pound. From 1997 onwards, as stated in the website of the company, Patakis has gradually transformed into a mainstream publishing house; the principal genres of the company are still school aid books and children's books, but efforts have been made not only to publish more literature but also to expand to even more genres such as science books, handbooks, lexicography and biographies.<sup>45</sup>

It is important to mention here that Stefanos Patakis, the owner, has consistently been supporting Greek young writers and has been investing the profit that derived from school aid books in their ventures. It is also fair to mention that Anna Patakis' conscious attempt to make a turn to quality foreign literature, in the context of which originated the publication of Borges, has only been plausible due to the prior enormous success of the trilogy of *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James. It is anticipated that not all the publications which appear under the imprint of a large mainstream publishing house will be of equal quality and status.

As Anna Pataki explains, the company has no backlist of Latin American or surrealist authors; she is currently trying to initiate a series of 'contemporary classics of the twentieth century' and the publication of Borges is the threshold for this endeavour. It was therefore of paramount importance to contract Borges' best translators, Kalokyris and Kyriakidis, and give them an incentive to revise their translations. This investment is regarded from a point of view of keeping significant authors of the twentieth century constantly in the limelight by enhancing and improving their Greek translations.<sup>46</sup>

### 2.3. Advertising and promotion

One of the first deductions to be made from the interviews with regard to the advertisement of Borges by the Greek publishing companies is the fact that the majority of the publishers employ only a specific kind of conscious marketing policy; namely, the cover design of the publications. Mavropoulos from Domos, Christophoridis from Ermis

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.patakis.gr/ViewShopArticle.aspx?ArticleId=1713> (10 July, 2014).

<sup>46</sup> Personal interview with misses Pataki, publisher of Patakis publishing company, 19 May 2014.

and Manousakis from Erato state clearly that they do not promote Borges by advertising campaigns nor by book presentations and commercial promotions. As a corollary, there is no particular emphasis on Borges' nationality or the qualities of magical realism and surrealism encountered in his work.

According to the publisher of Ypsilon, Charmanis, the publication of any high quality foreign literature book in Greece during the '70s and '80s is per se a significant event; therefore no further advertisement is required.<sup>47</sup> Online book promotion is obviously non-existent in Greece of the '70s, '80s and '90s. Copies of the books are at times sent to newspaper journalists and literary critics, but not consistently. As it is attested by most publishers, this method does not play an important role in the promotion of Borges; the most influential method which results in the Argentinian's dissemination is the word of mouth. The -initially small- group of intellectuals that is acquainted with Borgesian literature recommends him to other educated, inquiring readers and gradually the Argentinian's Greek reading circle expands.

This fact inevitably leads us to the subsequent question: what is the basis of these recommendations? Is Borges primarily extolled as a Latin American author? As a surrealist author? As a representative of magical realism? Or as an author with multiple elements from the Greek philosophy and mythology implanted in his texts?

The question has already partly answered itself. The basic attribute of Borges that is dispersed *viva voce* concurs with the reason the Latin American is published and with the way he is promoted by the publishers: it is solely the fact that Borges is exalted as being Borges.

As Kalokyris, Panteleskos from Libro and Karatzas from Roes explicate, from 1980s onwards the reputation of the author in Greece gradually augments; he is established in the conscience of the educated readers as an exceptional author whose works incorporate

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<sup>47</sup> Interview via mail with mister Charmanis, publisher of Ypsilon publishing company, 29 May 2014.

philosophical connotations and articulate in a unique way *lo real maravilloso*.<sup>48</sup> It is the quality of his works per se that makes Borges famous in Greece and dominates in the way he is perceived by publishers and readers. In my opinion, a contributing factor for this comprehension is that Greek readers have an already formulated view of what constitutes surrealism, acquainted as they are with the French surrealist works of Breton, Éluard and Aragon, and of Latin American magical realism, familiar as they are with the works of Gabriel García Márquez. To situate and promote Borges- whose literature, admittedly, deviates from the above- in a similar contextual framework would possibly confuse the Greek readers and would certainly constitute an injustice to Borges by downplaying his significance as a writer.

Moreover, even if the elements of Greek philosophy and mythology in his works are not crucial in his promotion, they do play a part in moulding the selection of texts in some anthologies throughout the decades, as the interview with Kalokyris reveals.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, in Borges's poems we encounter multiple explicit references to Heraclitus, or allusions to the Stoics ('La Historia de la Noche'), Pythagoras ('La luna') and Socrates ('El pasado'). Some of his poems are also dedicated to kings and deities of the Greek mythology such as Endymion, Proteas and Theocritus. A recurring figure in his poems is the persona of the wandering Odysseus. His short stories also contain Greek references, sometimes interwoven with the motif of the labyrinth as a symbol of the infinite; stories as such are the renown 'La casa de Asterión' which entails a subversive perspective on the myth of Minotaur and 'El inmortal', in which the narrator meets and becomes Homer. Poems and stories with Greek elements are indeed sometimes included for this attribute in some anthologies such as in *Poems* (2006) by Ellinika Grammata. But this is the only influence these elements have in his promotion. Exactly because British romanticists, German expressionists, Scandinavian deities, Kabbalists and many more heterogeneous components are sheltered next to the Greek ones in his works, the perception that prevails from early on is that of Borges as a truly global author, whose works incorporate diverse

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<sup>48</sup> Personal interviews with Kalokyris, Panteleskos and Karatzas, May 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Personal interview with mister Kalokyris, translator, 20 May 2014.

cultural and literary elements. And as the nature of demand is that it is based on the consumer's viewpoint of the product,<sup>50</sup> this is the dominant description of the Argentinian in the blurbs of the Greek publications.

A marketing method that is certainly underused by Greek publishers is the design of the books. All the small and medium publishers confess that no particular attention is paid to connect content and design nor to promote the book through its layout. Nevertheless, because at times the imprint and the appearance of the material product are interwoven,<sup>51</sup> we may distinguish Ypsilon's characteristic silver frame of the cover, usually in a black background, with the full name of the author printed in a large typeface on top and his photograph in black and white underneath. The consistent appearance of Ypsilon's Bogesian publications provides a nexus in the conscience of the readers of the imprint with the author.

It is however merely a coincidence that from early on the dominant motif in the cover design of most publishing houses is Borges' face. Paintings and designs of Latin American and Spanish artists are displayed only secondarily. This fact is derivative of the acknowledgment that Borges is widely recognized as a figure, and, as mentioned above, Borges is selling out as being Borges. As Squires mentions, 'author brand images work towards creating associations in readers' minds'<sup>52</sup> and book covers express certain interpretations of and aspirations for the book. The focus on Borges' face therefore implies a recognition of his literary genius and places him on a pedestal alongside with other pioneers of avant-garde literature. As a result, features such as his nationality or his surrealist elements are once again played out only as subordinate in the book covers.

In the course of time, Patakis is the publishing company that adopts a drastic advertising policy in Borges' promotion. A few months ago, the launching of the collective prose and poetry publications takes place in the Greek National Library; the

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<sup>50</sup>A. Baverstock, A., *Are books different? Marketing in the book trade* (London: Kogan Page, 1993), p.21.

<sup>51</sup> Squires, *Marketing Literature*, p.75.

<sup>52</sup> Squires, *Marketing Literature*, p.89.

editions are officially presented by the translators and a feast is organized. The National Library is selected in accordance with Borges' background as a librarian. Through the Greek institution, the occasion simultaneously gains in popularity. As Anna Pataki mentions, he is once again promoted as being Borges.<sup>53</sup> His books are advertised in large newspapers and literary magazines, such as in *Athens Review of Books*. Another promotional campaign is the frequent interactive presentations of the books by the translators, Kalokyris and Kyriakidis, in schools and bookshops. Banners of the editions projecting Borges' face are placed in large bookshops of Athens such as Ianos and Papatiriou. The general catalogue of Patakis publishing company in 2014 displays Borges is its cover. Finally, an attempt is currently being made by the publisher to urge the Ministry of Culture to choose Argentina as the honoured country of the upcoming Thessaloniki Book Fair, in order to promote Borges' books in an even wider scale.

#### *2.4. Some conclusions*

By delineating Borges' published volumes and by portraying the background of the publishing companies we may reach to certain conclusions considering his transmission in Greece.

To begin with, the initial publications of the author occur in the years after the change of the Greek political regime from dictatorship to democracy. This period is also a landmark for the foundation of many new publishing houses in the years after 1974. Borges' translation and publication coincides with the obviating of censorship and covers a need of the Greek readers to cultivate themselves and delve into novel literary movements. The desire for intellectual freedom, enacted through the reinstatement of the Greek publishing landscape from 1974 onwards, is symbolically played out through the publishing of avant-garde foreign literature.

The initial translational ventures are frequently indirect and only reluctantly probe into the writing techniques and literary motifs of the Argentinian. However, as Borges'

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<sup>53</sup> Personal interview with misses Pataki, publisher of Patakis publishing company, 19 May 2014.

prominence gradually grows in size during the 1980s, there is a consistent and meticulous importation of his texts by Ypsilon publishing house; the translations are attentive and the editions enhanced and well-made. In general, we detect a tendency to move from small, niche publishing houses such as Pleias, Eksantas and Domos in the 1970s, to medium publishing companies with symbolic capital such as Ypsilon, Nefeli and Roes in the 1980s, to large mainstream publishing houses such as Ellinika Grammata and Patakis in the 2000s. As Borges becomes popular in Greece, a shift of approach from a niche market to a mass market takes place which results in an aggregation of Borges' works in collective volumes by the latter companies. Instead of multiple publishers, large companies accumulate his works and publish him exclusively.

Regarding the question of how well does Borges sell in Greece, we discern that usually there is a print run of 2.000 or 3.000 copies, which always sells out and is followed by one or two or even three reprints. Patakis launches a first print run of 4.000 copies. However, due to the lack of figures of all publishing companies involved, we cannot form a complete image on this topic. Taking into consideration the Greek context, the number of copies seems pretty high. According to mister Gavrielidis, who has been part of the Greek publishing industry for more than 40 years, a title that sells more than 3.000 copies is considered highly successful for the Greek publishing field of the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>54</sup> It is also indicative of Borges' increasing popularity that the copies always sell out and are succeeded by multiple reprints.

The fact that all the publications are trade paperback editions of a medium size and price can also be explained by the *status quo* of the Greek book market; it is a usual practice for the Greek publishers to abstain from initially printing expensive hardback editions, as it is doubtful that the Greek readers could afford them.

Moreover, we infer that throughout the decades Borges is brought into the open by publishing companies of varying size and backlists. However, the reasons for his

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<sup>54</sup> Personal interview with mister Gavrielidis, publisher of Gavrielidis publishing company, 17 May 2014.

promulgation converge: Borges' publication emerges from a desire to publish high quality literature. As a corollary, all marketing policies are author-oriented, such as the dominance of Borges' face in the cover design of the editions. In my opinion, a bi-directional exchange of influence between the Greek reading society and the Greek publishing industry takes place in the case of the Latin American author. Greek publishers partly construct the audience's representation of the author as a literary virtuoso who inaugurates a new genre of literary fiction which combines principles of philosophy and the concept of marvellous reality. Simultaneously, they partly reaffirm the audience's pre-existing expectations of the author as an avant-garde foreign writer who occupies a particular place in literature per se, without being integrated to any confining classifications of nationality or literary movement. As it is evident, in the case of Borges, expectations and representations largely concur.



### *Chapter 3*

#### *Reception*

In 1983, Nasos Vagenas is sitting in a famous café in the centre of Athens when he suddenly sees Borges in the mirror. Vagenas has just finished writing a small essay about Borges for the literary magazine *Map*. He whispers: ‘Borges is here’. But all of his friends think he is joking; he immediately stands up and follows Borges who is with his wife Maria Kodama. In the dialogue that follows, an evidently moved Vagenas introduces himself and informs Borges that the editorial team of *Map* is preparing a special feature about him in the upcoming issue. Without any condescension in his tone, the Argentinian replies: ‘Is that so? That would be a great honour’.<sup>55</sup>

In the third and final chapter of this dissertation we will examine the reception of Borges in Greece by delving into germane literary commentaries and reviews. The selected reviews were chosen based on their content and on the importance and circulation of the literary magazines and newspapers in which they appeared. The (non-) availability of some materials was also a factor. One of the subsequent questions which will preoccupy us below will be how popular Borges has been in Greece during the twentieth and twenty-first century.

To begin with, Nasos Vagenas (1945,-), a Greek poet and translator, has studied Greek Philology in the University of Athens, acquired a Masters and a PhD in Literature in the University of Cambridge and has been teaching Literary Theory and Criticism in the University of Athens since 1992. Vagenas belongs to the small group of intellectuals who are initiated in Borgesian and Latin American literature along with Kyriakidis, Kalokyris and Giorgos Chouliaras. *Map* (1982-87) is a literary magazine published by Kalokyris; the core of the magazine consists of the above-mentioned individuals who coil around the periodical and contribute significantly in the transmission of Latin American literature in Greece. In 1983, the eighth issue of the magazine is published, which includes 130 pages exclusively dedicated to Borges. Present are many translations of his

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<sup>55</sup> N.Vagenas, ‘Borges in Panepistimiou’, *Map*, 8 (1983), p. 17.

texts such as the short stories ‘25th August, 1983’ and ‘Del rigor en la ciencia’, two conversations of Borges with the Argentinian journalists María Esther Vázquez and Norma Morandini as well as a basic timetable and bibliography. The contributors to this issue are multiple: Vagenas, Kalokyris, Kyriakidis, Chourmouziadis, Chouliaras and others. In addition to that, a text by Kalokyris entitled ‘The form of a myth’ is included with a description of the latter’s encounter with Borges in Athens.<sup>56</sup> Among other portrayals, Kalokyris refers to Borges’ comments on the Greek language as the threshold of humanity, on his praise of Italo Calvino and on his concern regarding violence in Latin America. The Greek’s comment on the Argentinian’s literature is that of an amalgam in which myth traverses the mirror of history. For Kalokyris, Borgesian texts philosophize on the symbols of civilization and succeed in introducing the reader to a universe reminiscent of a global conspiratorial encyclopaedia. Lastly, the issue also incorporates a poem by Vagenas entitled ‘Jorge Luis Borges in Panepistimiou street’. The poem is inspired by their previously described fortuitous meeting; some of the verses reveal Vagenas’ perception of Borges’ oeuvre as instilled with particles of the Greek mythology: ‘blinded Borges/ Polyphemus/ your voice soothes my bones/deep down you are Greek.’<sup>57</sup>

The literati who merge in *Map*’s publication specialize in Borges; however, the magazine has a very small circulation and a limited, initiated reading audience. But in March of 1984 Borges visits Greece once again, and in particular the island of Crete; the university of Crete makes Borges Doctor *Honoris Causa* with an official ceremony.<sup>58</sup> Borges’ reputation in Greece starts to augment.

Two years afterwards, Borges’ death detonates the appearance of a series of articles about the Argentinian. In 1986, one of the most important literary magazines of Athens, *The Word* includes in its 58th issue a feature about Borges. Still existent today, *The Word*

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<sup>56</sup>D. Kalokyris, ‘The form of a myth’, *Map*, 8 (1983), pp.23-29.

<sup>57</sup> <http://eimaistahaimou.blogspot.nl/2014/06/862014.html> (10 July, 2014).

<sup>58</sup> A. Sainis, ‘Fates of Borges in Greece’, *The Newspaper of the Editors*, 8 December 2013 <https://www.efsyn.gr/?p=157313> (10 July, 2014).

was founded in 1976 and had a wide circulation and a strong presence in the Athenian bookshops of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.

The issue incorporates translations of Borges' short story 'La memoria de Shakespeare' and of some of his poems. It also contains a review by the literary critic Christina Phili who describes Borges' work as 'saturated by the concepts of eternal return and timelessness'.<sup>59</sup> Phili's insightful commentary focuses on Borges' perception of the human time as a circle and as a part of a divine eternity. In addition, present in the issue is a two pages story by the poet and translator Thomas Skassis, entitled 'Post mortem'; the whimsical story depicts the death and funeral of Jorge Luis Borges in Buenos Aires. Under the title, Skassis proudly indicates his writing model as a subheading: 'a la manera de Jorge Luis Borges.'<sup>60</sup>

Lastly, what is of particular interest in this issue is a review by Manolis Savvidis entitled 'The active language of C.P. Cavafy and the erotic language of J.L.Borges.' A comparison is attempted between the Greek poet and the Argentinian. Among other remarks, Savvidis claims that Borges is not gradually becoming popular in Greece as a result of his nationality or his surrealist origins, but due to the fact that Cavafy's poetry has unwittingly prepared the ground for his reception. He also pinpoints the similarities between the two in their apt use of irony and in the fact that the motifs of both partly derive from history in order to satisfy their sense of belonging. The poetry of both is portrayed as 'self-centred and lonely'<sup>61</sup> and their eroticism as dormant.

With this review, Savvidis, who is a renowned literary critic and an eminent Cavafy scholar, inaugurates a comparison between Cavafy and Borges that becomes a recurring theme in the following decades. (This analogy was not unknown abroad: e.g. William Barnstone, 'Real and Imaginary History in Borges and Cavafy', *Comparative Literature*,

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<sup>59</sup> C. Phili, 'Jorge Luis Borges', *The Word*, 58 (1986), p.967.

<sup>60</sup> T. Skassis, 'Post Mortem', *The Word*, 58 (1986), pp.964-965.

<sup>61</sup> M. Savvidis, 'The active language of C.P. Cavafy and the erotic language of J.L.Borges', *The Word*, 58 (1986), p.958.

29 (1977), pp. 54-73.) In my opinion, one of the reasons this comparison remained fertile ground resides in the fact that Cavafy's poems have a latent tendency to prose and Borges' short stories a latent poeticism.

During the same year, two more features about Borges appear in important magazines, but with an absence of reviews written by Greek literary critics. Founded in 1974, *Instead* is a political and cultural left-wing magazine with a wide circulation. Five pages of issue 321 are dedicated to Borges; included are a brief bibliography, some translated poems and a translation of an important essay on Borges entitled 'L'utopie littéraire' by the French literary theorist Gérard Genette.<sup>62</sup> The translator and editor of the poems and essay, Christos Lazos, does not include any review of his own, probably due to his lack of expertise on Borges' writing style.

Simultaneously, *The Tree* incorporates in its 25<sup>th</sup> issue a fourteen pages long feature about the Argentinian. Of a medium circulation, *The Tree* was founded in 1978 and is a bimonthly literary magazine that has been consistently engaging with the review and promotion of Greek and foreign contemporary literature. The particular feature entails a translated poem by Kalokyris, an essay by the Cuban novelist and critic Guillermo Cabrera Infante and an essay by the French journalist Mathieu Lindon.<sup>63</sup> In this case as well, the editor Kalokyris abstains from adding any personal commentary or review about Borges.

Until this point, it is the above-mentioned literary journals which show an interest in Borges, with the addition of many other less extensive features in literary journals of a much smaller circulation. From 1986 to 1999, a scarcity is observed regarding the extensive reviews of Borges in magazines and newspapers. Interestingly, Borges' name is suddenly only rarely and briefly displayed in the periodical press. Could this invisibility be partly related to the lack of published translations of Borges' work in the Greek book market from 1991 to 2005 previously described? Perhaps.

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<sup>62</sup> C. Papoutsakis (ed), *Instead*, 321 (1986).

<sup>63</sup> K. Mavroudis (ed), *The Tree*, 25-26 (1986).

The only significant parenthesis to this oblivion is encountered in a book of literary theory written by Nasos Vagenas. In 1994, *The ironic language: critical studies about modern Greek literature* is published and is largely acclaimed. Vagenas is awarded the National Literary Critic Award for this work. Amongst other essays, the volume includes an essay entitled 'Borges, Cavafy and the Labyrinth of Irony'. In this interesting text Vagenas acutely juxtaposes once again the literary qualities of the two; one of the first similarities mentioned is the way they both employ their intellectuality in order to express emotion better. Vagenas acknowledges *Ficciones* and *El aleph* as the highest creations of the Argentinian; in them resides the unique capacity of Borgesian texts to act emotionally on the reader despite their 'coldness' and complete absence of linguistic sensuality. In the view of Vagenas, this emotional effect partly emerges from the texts' density of expression,<sup>64</sup> likewise with Cavafy. The Greek's poems are very short, compressed narrations which frequently accommodate historical allusions and abstain from any kind of evident lyricism.

In addition, for the Greek literary critic Borges and Cavafy largely coincide in their developed sense of irony; in their works, even 'the unexpected revelation that all things have an unknown side' is experienced as ironic.<sup>65</sup> Diffused in both, irony is their main artistic characteristic and is played out as a condensed concentration of emotions.

Lastly, Vagenas also pays homage to Borges' main literary motifs, acknowledging them as offsprings of the domains of philosophy, theology and literature per se. Indeed, Borges apprehension of the task of the author is brilliant exactly because it entails not 'a mimesis of daily life, but a mimesis of this first mimesis on a meta level, achieved by imitating literature and its representation of literary conventions.'<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> N. Vagenas, 'Borges, Cavafy and the labyrinth of irony', N.Vagenas, *The ironic language: Critical studies about modern Greek literature* (Athens: Stigmi, 1994), pp.115-116.

<sup>65</sup> Vagenas, 'Borges, Cavafy and the Labyrinth of Irony', p.109.

<sup>66</sup> Vagenas, 'Borges, Cavafy and the Labyrinth of Irony', p.120.

The next five years are relatively silent. However, in 1999 Borges' texts dynamically re-enter the scene of publicity. In the framework of the celebration of the 100 years since Borges' birth, reviews and critiques about the Argentinian start to be published regularly; the shift that occurs is that instead of in literary magazines, Borges would now mostly be reviewed in mainstream newspapers of a wide circulation.

In April of 1999, *Free Press*, one of the largest newspapers of Athens, includes in its independent literary section entitled *Library* a seven-page feature about Borges. *Library* is distributed every Sunday and mostly incorporates literary reviews and book suggestions. Under the title 'A century of Borges', translated texts of Borges and articles by Kalokyris, Aranitsis and the South African novelist and translator J.M.Coetzee are incorporated.

What is particularly fascinating in that case is an article by Aranitsis; Evgenios Aranitsis, (1955-) is a novelist, journalist and literary critic who has been working in *Free Press* since 1978. In his text he emphasizes Borges' literary perception of the world as a book or as a library –*liber mundi*– which can be read on condition that someone obtains a certain kind of metaphysical vocabulary or is mysteriously granted a certain code by the gods. Aranitsis also portrays Borges as an 'elegant antiquarian of literature'. Finally, the reviewer comments once more on the relationship between Borges and Cavafy; for him, the imaginary population of both emanates from ancient authors and poets, literary heroes and decayed kings. This pertains to the fact that the impetuses of both are not derived from experience, but from books, which are, for the initiated ones, fountains of dreams.<sup>67</sup>

During the same year, Kalokyris gives an interview to Foteini Balogianni, a journalist of the *Sunday Herald*. Although it was founded in 1997, the *Sunday Herald* quickly became the largest Sunday newspaper of Thessaloniki, accommodating news, entertainment and culture under its aegis. In his interview with Balogianni, Kalokyris depicts Borges to the Greek readers as a writer interested in Greek philology; Kalokyris

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<sup>67</sup>. E. Aranitsis, 'A century of Borges', *Library*, 46 (1999), pp.2-5.

does not hesitate to underline –perhaps excessively–Borges’ engagement with motifs from the Dionysiac, Thebaic and Homeric mythological cycles. In the interviewed’s view, Borges actively intervenes in mythical plots as if they have not yet come to an absolute end. Lastly, in the commercial context of this widely-read interview, which is definitely not indicative of Kalokyris’ mentality, Borges’ work is generically paralleled ‘to a mirror which transforms the essence of things into the material of dreams.’<sup>68</sup> Indicatively, the title of the interview is a paraphrase of Borges: ‘We are all Greek in exile.’<sup>69</sup>

Christina Komi-Kallinikou’s essay in issue 1729 of *New Home* of 2000s is never given the credit it deserves. As mentioned before, *New Home* was founded in 1927 and is one of the eminent and most longevous literary magazines of Greece. Although Kallinikou is mostly established as a translator, her essay entitled ‘Borges and tango: Comments around a misunderstood relationship’, provides a comprehensive approach to a side of Borges’ work neglected in Greece. Taking as a starting point the fact that both the dance and the author incarnate manifestations of the national identity of Argentina, she nevertheless succeeds in acknowledging the perplexity of this analogy. Kallinikou examines Borges’ perception of Buenos Aires, which is mostly evident in his initial works such as *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), *Luna de enfrente* (1925) and *Inquisiciones* (1925). The early Borges is illustrated as obsessed with the neighbourhoods in the outskirts of town, in which inanimate objects and memories acquire a life on their own, not dependent on correlations to an external objective reality but on a self-referential *mundus*. This area of mystery and wonders is ‘the merging point of the endless

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<sup>68</sup> F. Balogianni, ‘Dimitris Kalokyris talks about Borges and his work’, *Sunday Herald*, 30 May 1999, <[invenio.lib.auth.gr/record/5346/.../npa-2004-5158.pdf](http://invenio.lib.auth.gr/record/5346/.../npa-2004-5158.pdf)> (10 July, 2014).

<sup>69</sup> Despite the fact that Borges has in the past delineated the basis of Western culture as ‘half Greece, half Israel’, his actual phrase was: ‘I feel that I’m a European in exile.’ <http://www.digiovanni.co.uk/borges/borges-in-conversation/on-argentine-identity.htm> (10 July, 2014).

Argentinian pampa and the urban scenery.<sup>70</sup> However, Kallinikou observes that despite the fact that the music genre of tango symbolizes for many critics the transition from provincial to urban life, Borges in his early works does not identify it with his imaginary conception of the city, but scornfully disregards it as a symbol of decay, due to its vulgar language and fake sentimentality.<sup>71</sup>

Moving on, it is after the dawn of the twenty-first century that Borges' reputation in Greece gradually reaches its peak. Indicative of this is Kalokyris' book entitled *Beth, an archive about Borges* published by Ellinika Grammata in 2007. The whole book constitutes a homage to the Latin American; present are multiple photographs of Borges, interviews, translations of selected poems and short stories, short narrations of Vagenas' and Kalokyris' personal encounters with the author as well as a valuable bibliography of Borges' published books in Greece.<sup>72</sup> The significance of this honorary tribute resides, in my opinion, in the fact that Kalokyris compiles the material in such a way that he creates an inextricable cohesion between events from Borges' life and Borges' literature. Short stories, poems and images are presented ostensibly scattered but in reality constitute a continuum suggestive of Borges' biographical and literary route.

During 2013 and 2014, it was the upcoming republication of the collective works of Borges by Patakis which triggered a series of articles online in various newspapers and literary blogs. The majority of these articles comprise of biographical references and generic comments on Borges. However, some of them occasion appealing reviews regarding the Argentinian's literature.

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<sup>70</sup> C. Komi-Kallinikou, 'Borges and tango: Comments around a misunderstood relationship', *New Home*, 1729 (2000), p.825.

<sup>71</sup> Kallinikou, 'Borges and tango: comments around a misunderstood relationship', p.829.

<sup>72</sup> D. Kalokyris, *Beth, an archive about Borges* (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 2007).



One such article is written by the mathematician Giorgos Rizopoulos and is featured in the popular Greek blog *tvxs.gr* in November of 2013. Under the title ‘Borges and the mathematical Infinite’, Rizopoulos defines as one of Borges’ extraordinary qualities the fact that even if the latter had not studied Mathematics officially, his concerns about this topic are constant and present in many of his works; the short story ‘El libro de arena’ evolves around the ‘countable infinite’. Another example is the short story ‘La muerte y la brújula’. This detective story has as an underlying motif the ‘paradox of Zeno of Elea.’ In one of his riddles, the Greek philosopher claimed that since, when in motion, every possible distance can eternally be divided in half, the motion per se cannot even begin because every distance will be repeatedly split into two parts. Because the number of dichotomies is infinite, Zeno maintained that the action could never be completed. According to Rizopoulos, Borges applies this paradox in his story and makes an explicit reference with the words of the detective Erik Lönnrot: ‘I know a Greek labyrinth which comprises one single line. In this line many Philosophers were lost, let alone a simple detective.’ And Lönnrot continues by referring to a distance which turns into half, then a quarter, then an eighth... and is halved *sine fine*. Rizopoulos concludes this interesting approach by stating that in many of his works, Borges reveals a truly mathematical comprehension of the infinite and the definable.<sup>73</sup>

Another interesting piece was published in *The newspaper of the Editors*, a newspaper founded in 2013 and run by syndicalist members. Despite its brief history, this left-wing newspaper is currently the second in circulation in Greece. Under the title ‘Fates of Borges in Greece’, Aristotelis Sainis accurately provides a brief delineation of Borges’ initial seeds in the Greek reading audience. For Sainis, the core of Borges’ work can be encapsulated in the Borgesian parable encountered in the short story ‘Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote’ (1939): it is a whimsical depiction of wasting a whole life in an attempt

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<sup>73</sup> G. Rizopoulos, ‘Borges and the mathematical infinite’, *tvxs.gr*, 23 November 2013 <http://tvxs.gr/news/paideia/o-mporxes-kai-mathimatiko-apeiro-toy-giorgoy-rizopoyloy> (24 June, 2014).

to reproduce a faithful copy of a book. What is of interest is that Sainis prophesizes the emergence of Greek descendants with a similar writing style in the years to come.<sup>74</sup>

The review by Nikos Ksenios, once again written with the incentive of Pataki's publications is another illustrative example. Published in *bookpress.gr*, the blog of one of Athens biggest bookshops, Politeia, Ksenios' review is entitled 'Borges Universe' and is a canvas of information on Borges' life and carrier. In addition to these elements, Ksenios includes some commentary on Borges' writings. According to the Greek critic, the Borgesian novelty resides in the unconditional surrender of the reader to the admittance that even objective reality is up to a certain extent invented. As a corollary, one of the principal qualities of Borges is 'the constant regeneration of memory, from the individual memory to collective memory and vice versa, in order to achieve the abandonment of conventional time.'<sup>75</sup>

Finally, we bring this account of Borges' reception in Greece to an end with a vigorous review by Kyriakidis published in the newspaper *Dawn* in February 2014. Founded in 1952, *Dawn* is the oldest left-wing newspaper of Athens with a wide circulation and an explicit orientation in politics and culture. Under the title 'Borges in Greece', Kyriakidis initially outlines the role of the author as-in his opinion- it is conceived by Borges: the author writes in order to exorcize his personal daemons. Therefore, the author is inevitably haunted by an obsessive idea. According to the Greek reviewer, Borges' inspirations give birth to an inexhaustible number of stories, as they gradually develop in depth; exactly like a labyrinth. The Argentinian's thematic centre is more or less specific; its creative variations are countless. As Borges' literary essence, Kyriakidis recognizes the acknowledgement that 'the universe resides in each and every one of us; we all carry it, as a prospective offspring which we do not know but love and

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<sup>74</sup> Sainis, 'Fates of Borges in Greece', n.pag.

<sup>75</sup> N. Ksenios, 'Borges Universe', *bookpress.gr*, 2 March 2014  
<http://www.bookpress.gr/kritikes/xeni-pezografia/borges-apanta-ta-peza-kai-poihmata>  
(10 July, 2014).

feed with our blood'.<sup>76</sup> This notion manifests itself with many symbols in Borgesian texts: labyrinths, mirrors, libraries, the Alef, and many more. In addition, Kyriakidis underlines the illusionistic character of human existence present in many of Borges' stories: 'every person is simultaneously someone else, if not all of the rest, and the world is conceived as a personal projection of volition.'<sup>77</sup> Kyriakidis' review is well illustrated by many quotations of Borges' texts in his own translation.

Hand in hand with the above, Borges is creatively diffused in Greek culture. In 1982, the popular singer Loukianos Kelaidonis mentions Borges in his widely spread song *The party*: 'I wanna throw a party/a party of old times/and I wanna invite to this party/the best fellows/I want the Beatles to come/and Sarlo/and Kandinsky/and Borges/and Sinatra'. The intertextuality with Borges' works, with simultaneous explicit references to the Argentinian, is also evident to Vagenas' collection of short stories *The guild* (1976) and Aranitis' novel *Stories that some people I know liked* (1995).

As a conclusion, we deduce that from 1986 onwards Borges has gradually gained in reputation. Even if reviews about him have been present from early on, it is his death in 1986 that attracts wider publicity. And we may assume with some certainty that it is only after 1999 that Borges' name- at least- would be equally recognizable by the highly educated scholar and the casual Greek reader. This is a corollary of the fact that from 1999 onwards, large newspapers replace significant literary magazines in carrying the weight of his reviews. Well into the twenty-first century, the publications of his collective works by the large publishing companies Ellinika Grammata (2005) and Patakis (2014) reinforce his dissemination and trigger the online appearance of numerous reviews and brief references of varying quality and importance. Additionally, another observation is that throughout the decades, Borges had some faithful followers in Greece such as Vagenas, Kyriakidis and Kalokyris who strengthened his status. Lastly, we may discern some qualities of Borges' work which are consistently praised by Greek reviewers

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<sup>76</sup> A. Kyriakidis, 'Borges in Greece', *Dawn*, 2 February 2014  
<<http://www.avgi.gr/article/1824130/o-mporxes-stin-ellada>> (02 July, 2014).

<sup>77</sup> Kyriakidis, 'Borges in Greece', n.pag.

throughout the decades. Many critics emphasize his literary representation of time and infiniteness; his perception of external reality as a deceitful amalgam; and his congruity with Cavafy, as adept users of irony and subdued emotionalism.

## *Conclusion*

The history of Jorge Luis Borges' publication and reception in Greece reveals a dynamic interaction between the Argentinian author and the Greek readers. The introduction of the Borgesian oeuvre in Greece coincides with the end of the military junta in 1974 and is situated in a subsequent framework of intellectual expansion and literary exploration. The initial publication of his books is most of the times an initiative of newly-founded publishing companies that incorporate Borges in their backlist in an attempt to promote avant-garde foreign literature. There is no previous acquaintance of the Greek readers with any similar writing style.

In the following decades, Borges' absorption in Greece is gradually upward and to a certain extent contingent to a group of loyal Borgesian aficionados. During the twenty-first century and as a result of the global conglomerating tendency, two large mainstream publishing houses acquire the translational rights of the Argentinian instead of the polyphony of multiple niche publishing houses that published him in the previous decades.

From the research conducted for this paper, we make the deduction that Borges has become quite popular to the average Greek reader of the twenty-first century. From 1974 to 2014, a significant shift occurs; within forty years, Borges' figure in Greece is transformed from an elite, exceptional author only read by a small group of intellectuals to a well-liked, broadly-read writer recognizable by the majority of readers.

To end up, we must confess that the striking affiliation of the Greek readers with the Latin American is somewhat hard to comprehend. The multiple publications of his works and his progressive promotion in newspapers, literary magazines and blogs is definitely a contributing factor; besides that, I believe that one of the reasons Borges has such an important impact in the Greek reading *mundus* is his writing style. His unique mannerism suits appropriately the mentality of a reading audience, which, from 1974 onwards, passionately seeks cultural amplification. The intertextuality of his works, the liberty – almost the invitation- in subjective interpretations, the figurative wanderings in temporal and spatial labyrinths, trigger the imagination and intellectuality of the thirsty Greek

readers, by offering them an unconfined universe with endless possibilities in which they can either project or lose themselves. After all, maybe the explanation for his acclaim in Greece lies somewhere in Borges own perception of the readers:

‘I think that the reader should enrich what he is reading. He should misunderstand the text; he should change it into something else.’

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