

ROSEMARY ARROJO

From: **“Writing, Interpreting, and the Power Struggle for Control of Meaning: Scenes from Kafka, Borges, and Kosztolány”** in Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler (ed.) *Translation and Power* (2002) Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

“If, as Nietzsche argues, any attempt at mastering a text, or the world as text, “involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous ‘meaning’ and ‘purpose’ are necessarily obscured or even obliterated” (1969:12), the implicit relationship that is usually established between authors and interpreters is not exactly inspired by cooperation or collaboration, as common sense and the essentialist tradition would have it but, rather, is constituted by an underlying competition, by a struggle for the power to determine that which will be (provisionally) accepted as true and definite within a certain context and under certain circumstances. As Kafka’s and Borges’s stories have shown us, in this textualized, human world, where immortal essences and absolute certainties are not to be found, the indisputable control over a text, its full completion, and the definite establishment of its limits cannot be simplistically determined nor merely related to its author once and for all. If one cannot clearly and forever separate the author from the interpreter, the text from its reading, or even one text from another, and if the will to power as authorial desire is that which moves both writers and readers in their attempts at constructing textual mazes that could protect their meanings and, thus, also imprison and neutralize any potential intruder, is it ever possible for interpreters to be faithful to the authors or to the text they visit?

Obviously, it is not by chance that this has always been the central issue and the main concern for all those interested in the mechanism of translation, an activity that provides a paradigmatic scenario for the underlying struggle for the control over meaning that constitutes both writing and interpretation as it involves the actual production of another text: the writing of the translator’s reading of someone else’s text in another language, time, and cultural environment. As it necessarily constitutes material evidence of translator’s passage through the original and as it offers documented proof of the differences brought about by such a passage, any translation is bound to be an exemplary site for the competitive nature of textual activity. In a tradition that generally views originals as the closed, fixed receptacle of their authors’ intentional meanings, the struggle for the power to determine the “truth” of a text is obviously decided in favor of those who are considered as the “rightful” owners of their texts’ meanings and who supposedly deserve unconditional respect from anyone who dares to enter their textual “property”. In such a tradition, translators are not

only denied the rights and privileges of authorship but also must endure a reputation for treachery and ineptitude while being urged to be as invisible and as humble as possible. (pp. 73-74)

