

Translation in Lydia Davis's Work

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the position of translations in the work of the US-American writer and translator Lydia Davis. Davis has been publishing stories and translations since the early 1970s, and has translated works by Maurice Blanchot, Michel Leiris, and Marcel Proust among others. This thesis argues that her translations form a graft onto the body of her own fiction; they are both part of her work and retain their identity as being written by someone else.

The first chapter builds on theory from translation studies and literary criticism to formulate a theory of translation as a form of writing that creates texts which are recognised to be equivalent to another, pre-existing text in another language. The second chapter posits three main tendencies for how an author's translations may be seen to interact with their other writings: no relationship; training or influence; and dialogue.

The next four chapters provide case studies which analyse Davis's translations in relation to other texts by Davis and the author she translated. Chapter three focuses on Blanchot, who is an important figure for Davis. Chapter four analyses Davis's relationship of influence and dialogue with Leiris. Chapter five posits that Davis creates a dialogue with Proust in her translation and her novel. Chapter six questions Davis's rejection of some of her translations as 'work-for-hire', focusing on Léon-Paul Fargue, whose writing is only superficially similar to Davis's, and Danièle Sallenave, whom Davis rewrites in her own novel.

The final two chapters analyse how Davis's own stories use translation and similar intertextual techniques, questioning the boundaries of translation as a practice. These stories make translation a central part of Davis's work, as it operates within the structure of some of her stories as well as in the more conventional sense of her translations of other writers.

KEYWORDS: adaptation, author-translator, Blanchot, influence, intertextuality, Leiris, literary translation, Lydia Davis, Proust, translation and writing, translation in the U.S.A.

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