

Displacing the Mask: Jorge Luis Borges and the translation of narrative

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies the transformations that occur in Jorge Luis Borges's translations of Anglo-American fiction into Spanish. This project argues that Borges inscribed his tastes, values, and judgments about the literature he was translating onto the target-language texts, and in doing so altered important aspects of the source-language narratives: the identities of their characters, the ethical and rhetorical positioning of their narrators, their plots, and even the genres to which those narratives belong. The dissertation focuses on Borges's four book-length translations from the English: *A Room of One's Own* (1929, translated 1936) and *Orlando* (1928, translated 1937) by Virginia Woolf, *The Wild Palms* (1939, translated 1940) by William Faulkner and *Bartleby* (1853, translated 1943) by Herman Melville, as well as Borges's translation fragment 'Penelope' from James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922, translated 1925).

There are two major influences that guide the transformations this project explores, one aesthetic and one ideological. The aesthetic motivation is Borges's preference for action over description, which culminates in a strong distaste for what he terms "psychological narrative", in which characters' interiority forms an essential element of the plot. Borges preferred adventure novels and detective fiction; correspondingly, wherever possible, he made changes to the form and content of the novels he translated to move them closer to the action-centered, personality-effacing fiction he preferred. The primary ideological influence I have found is a heteronormative understanding of gender and sexuality, which gives way to polarized representations of masculinity and femininity. In almost every translation, Borges pushes back against non-normative representations of gender and sexuality, reorienting characters toward traditional gender stereotypes. These two motivations, gender and genre, show themselves to be intertwined in Borges's translation practice; removing or rewriting the psychological aspects of narrative texts frequently comes about by shifting the gender and sexuality of a text's characters and the ideological positioning of its author.

By focusing on a substantial subset of his translation work—Anglo-American fiction—this project fills a gap in the scholarship on Borges and translation, which to date has only selectively analyzed isolated texts. It also affords scholars of Borges's writing style access to perspectives previously unavailable, by demonstrating what his transformations to source texts' styles say about his own. A scholarly intention of this dissertation is also to demonstrate the relevance of translation to a number of academic fields, including narratology, women's studies, sexuality studies, and comparative literature. Comparative translation analyses reveal cultural representations of gender, ideological positions on sexuality, and radical reformulations of texts' narrative communication situations, all of which open important new avenues these disciplines may follow. At the same time, this project encourages the linguistics-based and empirically

oriented branches of translation studies to employ comparative translation analysis not only to study translation itself, but as a basis for the critical analysis of translated literature.

KEYWORDS: Borges, gender, modernism, narrative, translation, sexuality.

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