

***BORGES'S CREATIVE INFIDELITIES: TRANSLATING JOYCE, WOOLF, AND
FAULKNER BY LEAH LEONE ANDERSON***

Borges's Creative Infidelities: Translating Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner, Leah Leone Anderson. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024. Hardback £80. ISBN 9781501398285

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At the time of writing, the University of Pittsburgh's esteemed 'Borges Center' lists 1,490 works of literary criticism on the work of this author. Unlike Jorge Luis Borges's totalizing 'Biblioteca de Babel', this list is far from exhaustive. For instance, it focuses primarily on academic articles, rather than books and dissertations. Still, the sheer number of publications gives a sense of the unfathomable universe of Borgesian criticism, as well as the daunting prospect of claiming to add a new star to this expansive constellation. Seemingly undeterred, Leah Leone Anderson's *Borges's Creative Infidelities* constitutes an original, refreshing, and thought-provoking study of Borges's translations into Spanish of three of his contemporaries: James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner.

The book's enticing cover is a reproduction of the seventeenth-century Portuguese painting *Caça ao Leopardo* [Hunting the Leopard]. Out of the picture in this cropped version are three Indigenous Brazilians who wait eagerly for the misnamed leopards—they are jaguars—to fall into their trap. Their exclusion puts into sharp relief one of the jaguars: it is being tempted into the man-made trap by a mirror, an image of himself he mistakes for another animal. For Anderson, this illustration helps to visualise Borges's conception of the art of translation:

For Borges, a translation is not a mirror of the original (believing it forms the trap), but rather it reveals the original to be a reflection as well; indeed, it is a reflection of texts and stories that are constantly shifting with each reading, reference, and retelling. (159)

This insight chimes with much of the criticism published within the sub-field of Borges and Translation: studies like Efraín Kristal's *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* (2002) and Sergio Waisman's *Borges and Translation: The Irreverence of the Periphery* (2005) stand out, although there have also been contributions by Eleni Kefala (2007), Marcy Schwartz (2007), and Suzanne Jill Levine (2013), amongst many others. The fact that Anderson was influenced by most of these scholars is duly acknowledged (7-8), but she successfully carves her own approach to the subject matter.

Firstly, she seeks to map how Borges's own views on the art of translation—the notion of "creative infidelity" which permeates many of his own short stories and essays—inform his own practice as a translator. The synergy, as well as the occasional gulf, between Borges's theory and practice are compelling to observe playing out, as are the ways in which the different stages of Borges-the-writer influenced decisions made by Borges-the-translator. Secondly, if Borges is sometimes accused of being a one-trick pony, so Anderson claims to be one as well (9): her methodology consists of a detailed, line-by-line comparison between the source and

target texts. This methodical approach yields rare marvels about some of Borges's decisions which other studies are likely to overlook. Lastly, the decision to focus on translations of these three titans of English literature makes the monograph all the more enriching. Starting with his maternal lineage, Borges had a life-long affinity with English—famously quipping in an interview that English was “a far finer language” than Spanish. More importantly, some of the highly acclaimed writers associated with the so-called ‘Latin American Boom’ like Gabriel García Márquez could only be influenced by these modernist authors via Borges's translations, and these translations in turn became highly marketable products in the Hispanic publishing industry which are still sought after today.

In Chapter One, ‘A Faithful Rebellion’, Anderson focuses on Borges's translation of two pages from ‘Penelope’, the final episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), published in 1925 alongside his review of the novel. The careful attention paid to the context of the translation allows for revelatory factual nuggets to emerge. For example, the fact that, in *Inquisiciones* (1925), Borges claimed to be the first Hispanicist to translate Joyce when he was aware of a 1924 translation by Antonio Marichalar (26). Whereas Marichalar's translation proved to be formally experimental, Borges's rendition of Molly Bloom's interior monologue remains much closer to Joyce's text, “recreating its feminine eroticism” (32). That said, Anderson's study shows how Molly Bloom's birthplace of Gibraltar allows Borges to produce a translation which aligns with postcolonial gestures present in much of his own writing during the 1920s: “[...] a key creative opportunity arose from Spanish, in the case of Gibraltar, being the language of the colonized, rather than the colonizer – putting the Rock in a position analogous to Argentina” (33). Indeed, Borges transposes parts of the monologue through certain lexical choices, use of toponyms and the *voseo* conjugations characteristic to River Plate Spanish, to the Argentine pampas.

In Chapter Two, ‘The Long Shadow’, Anderson selects Borges's 1936 translation of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), published by Editorial Sur under the auspices of the influential editor and long-time Borges confidant, Victoria Ocampo. Some of Borges's questionable choices had led Anderson, in a 2009 article, to state categorically that the “translation's ideological and aesthetic antagonism toward Woolf's English version, however, make it an unacceptable means for approaching her work” (49). This study takes some distance from those previous remarks and refreshingly states that upon reflection, “his translation certainly can be a useful tool for approaching *A Room of One's Own* when deployed critically” (49). Analysing the translation critically still entails considering it through the lens of gender: for example, Anderson points out Borges's counter-intuitive translation of Woolf's “we” using the masculine or mixed-group personal pronoun “nosotros” (instead of the feminine “nosotras”) when the narrator is addressing a university lecture hall full of women at “Oxbridge” (56-57). Additionally, a suggestion of sexual assault in Woolf's text appears to be omitted in the translation (58) while Borges's text regularly downplays references to prohibitions that have impaired women from writing or from being recognised (64). Despite these shortcomings, the publication of Borges's translation of a feminist text in a literary establishment characterised by casual misogyny still [was unprecedented and extremely impactful, as many reception studies attest] (73). In turn, Borges's text itself has become a rich locus for discussions about translation and feminism.

Chapter Three, ‘Bringing Back the Biographer’, centres on Borges’s translation of Woolf’s *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), published in instalments by the literary journal *Sur* in 1935 and 1936. Anderson’s contextual analysis reveals that Borges is likely to have written what is arguably his most influential essay on translation, ‘Los traductores de *Las 1001 noches*’ [The Translators of *The 1001 Nights*] (1936) as he laboured on Woolf’s texts. Borges’s compelling argument for a creative approach to this practice, where translators can themselves become the storytellers, at times influences his own approach to Woolf. After considering some of Borges’s more problematic choices—especially surrounding the use of language in relation to Orlando’s change of sex—the author argues that it would be too facile to claim that this translation sought to underplay the novel’s queerness. Instead, she focuses on other grammatical choices which do express Orlando’s different identities (81).

Chapters Four and Five, ‘Changing Gender Changes Genre’ and ‘Borges’s and Faulkner’s Old Man’, study the translations into Spanish of Faulkner’s novel *The Wild Palms* (1939) and the short story ‘Old Man’ (1939), respectively. Anderson first focuses on the reception of Borges’s 1940 translation of *The Wild Palms*, especially on authors who would go on to lead the Latin American Boom in the 1960s and 70s. The powerful effect it had upon said authors, coupled with the meagre reception of Faulkner’s original text in an Anglophone context, suggests—in a very Borgesian manner—that the translation “has almost categorically been found to surpass the original” (109). Yet, Anderson’s detailed study points towards the irony of this scholarly consensus despite the fact that Borges’s translation was “based on a censored original and riddled with errors” (109). Whereas writers like Juan Bener and Juan Carlos Onetti accused Borges of censoring Faulkner by deleting swearing and sex scenes, Anderson’s analysis points to the fact that Borges was working from a British—rather than American—version of the text which had prudishly sanitised Faulkner’s original (113). Anderson shows some scepticism regarding the scholarly consensus about Borges’s alleged improvement on the original after pointing to mistranslations, inconsistencies, omissions, and misattributions. The motivation behind this approach might be a lot more prosaic than theoretical: “it is entirely likely that Borges had a quick deadline to meet” (115). Building on Theo Hermans’s article, ‘The Translator’s Voice in Translated Narrative’ (1996), in the final chapter Anderson considers the three ways in which the translator’s visibility comes through in Borges’s version of ‘Old Man’: (i) when the needs of the implied reader of the translator differ from those of the implied reader of the original; (ii) when the self-referential nature of language allows the translator to foreground the otherness of the source text; and (iii) when the cultural references are so alien that they require some kind of “contextual overdetermination” by the translator (155-56).

There is much to admire and learn from Anderson’s stance and scholarly attitude in this book: identifying problematic decisions a translator made without lambasting them in an acontextual fashion; seeking to move her practice away from the traditional act of “critiquing” in favour of “connecting”; demonstrating a detailed understanding not only of the nuances of the source texts, but also of the subtleties of the form of River Plate Spanish Borges wrote in. In her own approach to academic writing, Anderson embodies that of her subject matter: “Translation for Borges is a critical dialogue, not a one-way transmission” (15).