

## A Translation of His Own: Borges and *A Room of One's Own*

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From 1935 to 1936, Victoria Ocampo published Jorge Luis Borges's translation of *A Room of One's Own* in four installments of her influential literary journal, *Sur*.<sup>1</sup> While *Mrs. Dalloway* had already appeared in translation in Spain in 1930, it is significant that Virginia Woolf's writing was introduced to Latin America in the form of a feminist essay. While Ocampo's involvement with Argentine women's movements is often described as brief and limited by her elite class alliance, her publication of *Un cuarto propio* (*A Room of One's Own*) and *Tres guineas* (*Three Guineas*, 1941) represented potentially important contributions to liberal feminist dialogue at a time when most Latin American women were without suffrage or full property rights.<sup>2</sup> In a study on *Sur*, John King states that Ocampo was able to use "a publishing house of her own" to help combat some of the injustices revealed by Woolf's analyses." He adds, "on a purely literary level, Woolf was a consummate artist and Ocampo was lucky to find Borges as a translator" (81). Since he has become an internationally recognized author, Borges's name has undoubtedly promoted the sale of *Un cuarto propio*, and his translation of *Orlando*<sup>3</sup> (published by *Sur* in 1937), but a comparative analysis between the English and the Spanish texts suggests Ocampo's "luck" in employing Borges to disseminate a feminist message is most certainly up for debate. On both syntactic and semantic levels, the Spanish reveals translation practices that tone down, alter or even eliminate many of the most salient feminist elements of Woolf's essay.

In the following examination of Borges's problematic transposition of syntax and subversive translation of gender-related content in *A Room of One's Own*, I am not interested in a revisionist reading to denounce a translator in 1935 for not adhering to the standards of a feminist scholar in 2009. Rather, I seek to highlight the aspects of Borges's translation strategy that have created undermining or contradictory meanings in the text and to inquire about the consequences of those practices on *Un cuarto propio* and its legacy in the Spanish language. As the

<sup>1</sup> Issues 15-18.

<sup>2</sup> For more about the parallel forces of liberal and socialist feminism in the Southern Cone, see Asunción Lavrín, *Women, Feminism and Social Change in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay 1890-1940*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> When Spain's widely read newspaper, *El País*, released its own edition of *Orlando* for a marketing promotion in 2002, the ad claimed, "The Spanish edition has deluxe translator: Jorge Luis Borges" ([http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cultura/Orlando/Virginia/Woolf/elpepicul/20021003elpepicul\\_6/Tes](http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cultura/Orlando/Virginia/Woolf/elpepicul/20021003elpepicul_6/Tes)).

product of a superb creative writer, Borges's translation is remarkable in many respects; indeed many of the practices with which I take issue are necessarily those of a skillful artist. The translation's ideological and aesthetic antagonism toward Woolf's English version, however, make it an unacceptable means for approaching her work. *A Room of One's Own*, as Susan Gubar states, "has become a classic—if not *the* touchstone text—in the history of feminism" (xxxvi); Spanish language readers of Borges's translation are excluded from many of the most innovative features that have rendered *A Room of One's Own* such an essential feminist text.

Since its full-length publication in 1936 by Ocampo's publishing house—also called Sur—the Borges translation has been reprinted numerous times, and remains the primary source through which Spanish language readers access *A Room of One's Own*. The 2003 reprint under Alianza Editorial of Madrid—one of the largest Spanish language publishers—is currently the most widely available edition, distributed both in Spain and the Americas. That same year, a feminist publishing house in Madrid, Horas y Horas, printed a new translation. The essay's translator, María-Milagros Rivera Garretas, claims that in the two previous translations available in Spain (by Borges and Laura Pujol), "the undifferentiated grammatical genders in English often do a dance of death with meaning [*sentido*]."<sup>4</sup> Rivera Garreta's concern is not a recent phenomenon: in 1993, two alternative translations of the text appeared in Latin America. The first was by Gerardo Gambolini, released in Buenos Aires through A-Z Editora. Another, by Edmundo Moure and Marisol Moreno was published in Santiago de Chile through Cuarto Propio Editorial—a feminist press—in an edition they claim is "based on a free adaptation" of Borges's translation (5). However, these retranslations may have more to do with the price of acquiring Borges's copyrighted work than with concern about his anti-feminist translation practices (Gambolini). Pujol's translation has been available since as early as 1967 through Seix Barral of Barcelona, under the title *Una habitación propia*. Despite the presence of alternative translations, the Alianza edition is by far the most affordable and available. Furthermore, as one of the world's foremost intellectuals and authors, Borges's name alone often sells the works he has translated.<sup>5</sup>

There is little documentation of *Un cuarto propio*'s immediate reception in Latin America.<sup>6</sup> King writes in general terms: "Ocampo disseminated Woolf's

<sup>4</sup> My translation: <http://www.unapalabraotra.org/horasyhoras/cosecha.html>

<sup>5</sup> This may especially be the case for Borges's translation of Faulkner's *The Wild Palms*, which is frequently mentioned as an important influence on Boom writers, but has received considerably less attention in English.

<sup>6</sup> In her study on the reception of Woolf in Spain, Laura María Lojo Rodríguez suggests that many of the Spanish translations produced by Sur had wider circulation in Spain than in Latin America, as a result of criticism by nationalist intellectuals who censured Sur's Eu-

work in Latin America at a very early date and thus helped to place on the agenda the problems of women in general...and women writers in particular" (81). Ocampo was a founding member of the women's advocacy group *Unión Argentina de Mujeres* (UAM), and worked as its president from 1936 to 1938, the same time she was publishing *Un cuarto propio*. It is therefore reasonable to expect the text to have circulated among UAM members. One might also deduce that the text was read and discussed among women associated with *Sur*, such as Silvina Ocampo, Norah Lange and María Rosa Oliver. While these seem safe assumptions, the manners in which *Un cuarto propio* actually contributed to Latin American women's movements of the 1930s and 1940s are yet to be established. Its influence on later generations of feminists, however, is quite clear. As Mónica Ayuso points out in her recent article, "Virginia Woolf in Mexico and Puerto Rico," Woolf's work was central to the formation of writers such as Rosario Castellanos and Rosario Ferré, who were leaders in the advancement of feminism in Mexico and Puerto Rico, respectively (1). Likewise, in her introduction to a Mexican edition (Colofón) of Borges's *Un cuarto propio*, Raquel Serur argues that "it would be impossible not to leave off names if we were to list all of the women writers who have nourished themselves with this text, both in terms of feminist thought and in the craft of writing of fiction" (18, my translation).

With regards to Ocampo personally, King argues that she took to heart Woolf's claim that women need money and a room of their own in order to write, and therefore used her journal as a forum and showcase for women writers (82). Woolf's essay influenced Ocampo's own writing as well; in 1937 she published an article in *Sur*, claiming: "My only ambition is to someday write, maybe well, maybe poorly, but as a woman.... [s]ince I understand that a woman cannot express her feelings and thoughts in a masculine style, just as she cannot speak with a man's voice" (12, my translation).<sup>7</sup>

Though she acknowledged her belief that women cannot express themselves as men do, Ocampo apparently did think it possible for men to express a woman's feelings and thoughts in translation. Borges may have seemed the perfect translator for Woolf's texts; he was an erudite writer and critic fluent in English and abreast of all of England's latest literary trends. Ocampo might even have found the two authors to have a significant amount in common, given their centrality to the modernist movements in their respective countries.<sup>8</sup> In addition to innovative

rocentric vision, the concentration of Spanish exiles working on the journal and Ocampo's own ties to the Spanish literary scene, particularly to Ortega y Gasset (240).

<sup>7</sup> "Woolf, Orlando y Cia." Issue 35 (1937). Based on a talk she had given at "Amigos del arte" in July 1937.

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that for *Al faro* (*To the Lighthouse*), published by Sur in 1938 and *Tres guineas* (*Three Guineas*) published in 1941, Ocampo did not employ Borges to translate, but two other men: Antonio Marichalar and Román J. Jimenez, respectively.

writing styles and revolutionary concepts of narrative time, the two authors share a tendency to include an unusually large number of external references, evidence of their vast literary repertoires. Each author's work also revealed contempt for the totalitarian regimes that proliferated across the globe during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Both writers belonged to elite intellectual circles at the center of the Spanish and English speaking worlds' literary avant-gardes, and both sustained themselves as authors by publishing literary criticism. In effect, within their intellectual and cultural spheres, Woolf and Borges held positions whose remarkable comparability merits further study.

The ideological and stylistic differences between the two, however, resulted in a translation of *A Room of One's Own* that bears problematic differences from the English. In an earlier article, "The Unlike[ly] Other: Borges and Woolf," Ayuso has pointed out that Borges was an improbable translator of Woolf's work because he had such great contempt for what he called "the psychological novel": one that emphasizes characters' thoughts, feelings and motives over plot.<sup>9</sup> Ayuso was also the first scholar to publish a critique of the sexist/gender normative tendencies in Borges's translations of *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own*. In her assessment of his work she finds:

When Borges translates literally and accurately, his voice is that of a purveyor of high culture responsible for transmitting, as transparently as he can, the ideas he received and so greatly admired. In this instance he positioned himself vis-à-vis Woolf's text almost as an absence. His presence is more clearly felt in the rendering of gender [in which] he adopts a critical masculine presence which sabotages the texts. (249)

In matters of overt acculturation of Woolf's work, Borges's intervention as a translator is fairly hard to see. However, in addition to the more visible manhandling of gender, Borges's rejection of the "psychological novel" is also

While Alberto Lázaro has found Marichalar to be an admirer of Woolf's work, it remains to be determined if this was a choice on the part of Ocampo or on the part of Borges (248-49). In her collaboration with the Buenos Aires publishing house Sudamericana, she also published *La señora Dalloway* (1939) in translation by Ernesto Palacio.

<sup>9</sup> Borges wrote in his introduction to Adolfo Bioy Casares' *The Invention of Morel*: "The typical psychological novel is formless. The Russians and their disciples have demonstrated, tediously, that no one is impossible: happy suicides, benevolent murderers, lovers who adore each other to the point of separation, informers who act out of fervor or humility.... In the end such complete freedom is tantamount to chaos. But the psychological novel would also be a 'realistic' novel, and have us forget that it is verbal artifice, for it uses each vain precision (or each languid obscurity) as new proof of verisimilitude" (243).

tangibly inscribed in his translations of Woolf, making the "absence" Ayuso notes particularly problematic. Sherry Simon argues that a feminist translation crucially affirms the translator's participation in the creation of meaning by drawing attention to her decision making process (29). Borges, by contrast, includes no footnotes, translator's note or theoretical discussion in either *Un cuarto propio* or *Orlando* to explain why, among other decisions, he chose actively to change the diegetic nature of Woolf's narrators in his translations.

In *La constelación del Sur*, a study on Sur's impact on Spanish language letters through its translation of foreign works, Patricia Willson finds physical evidence of Borges's well-known distaste for psychological narration in his translation of *Orlando*:

By highlighting the intrusive nature of the narrator, Borges dismantles the syntactical structures often imposed by the notions "author" and "text," to create—within the English literary tradition—a new syntax which removes Virginia Woolf from the issue of psychological mimesis (154, my translation).

By breaking up run-on sentences, adding paragraph breaks and inserting colons, dashes and parentheses, Borges's translation of *Orlando* clearly marks the distinction between the narrator and the narrated action—covertly moving Woolf's narrative style from intradiegetic in English to extradiegetic in Spanish.<sup>10</sup> As we will see, the same narrative techniques Willson notes in *Orlando* characterize Borges's translation of *A Room* as well.

Transforming Woolf's "psychological" writing into a style of writing he found more artistically acceptable is a hallmark of Borges's translation aesthetic. Translation was a subject that intrigued the Argentine writer; translators, the act of translating and the reading of translated literature was a central theme in many of his critical and literary works. His non-fiction essays "Las dos maneras de traducir" ("The Two Ways to Translate," 1926), "Las versiones homéricas" ("The Homeric Versions," 1932) "Los traductores de las 1001 noches" ("The Translators of the 1001 Nights," 1935), and "Nota sobre el *Ulises* en español" ("Note regarding *Ulysses* in Spanish," 1946) demonstrate a clear and progressively developing theory regarding the art of literary translation. Laid out in detail in Efraín Kristal's *Invisible Work* and Sergio Waisman's *Borges and Translation*, his theory assumes that once a piece has been published, the intentions, rhetoric, personality, even the historical and cultural moment of the author cease to be of importance. The text belongs to the world of letters and will fulfill whatever function is required by the literary system in which it exists. Consequently, a translator is not bound by any

<sup>10</sup> For more on issues of gender in Borges's translation of *Orlando*, see Leah Leone, "La novela cautiva: Borges y la traducción de *Orlando*," *Variaciones Borges* 25 (2008): 223-36; Mónica Ayuso, "The Unlike[ly] Other: Borges and Woolf."

ethic that obliges "fidelity" or "obedience" (two very problematic concepts in their own right<sup>11</sup>) to a text when translating. Rather, a translator should seek to fulfill the aesthetic potentialities of the source text, possibilities that existed but were not realized by the author. In his assessment of J.C. Madrus's translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* into French, for example, Borges praises the liberties the translator has taken with the text—finding them much more interesting than any notion of textual "fidelity": "his infidelity, his creative and felicitous infidelity, is what should concern us" ("Los traductores" 112, my translation).

If in Borges's opinion, "a translator should not be faithful to an imperfect text, but to a perfectable work" (Kristal 9), the "creative infidelities" this article will explore are, if not justifiable, at least consistent with his theoretical principles—what they say about what he found aesthetically pleasing is another story. His appropriation and re-working of texts in translation may even seem analogous to the practice of feminist translators like Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood who "hijack" texts to make their translations explicitly feminist, bringing them in line with their own political aesthetic (von Flotow 78). A fundamental difference lies in the fact that feminist translators make themselves and their translation strategies visible in prefaces, footnotes and other paratext, while Borges's "invisible work" (to borrow a phrase from Kristal) may lead unwitting readers of *Un cuarto propio* to approach the text as if it were a mimetic copy of *A Room of One's Own*. Lawrence Venuti describes the "absence" noted by Ayuso as "fluent" translation strategy, which "produces the effect of transparency, whereby the translated text is taken to represent the foreign author's personality or intention or the essential meaning" of her text without the intervention of a third party (187). As a result of this "absence," Spanish language readers may engage with *Un cuarto propio* as if they were engaging with Woolf herself, free from the results of Borges's interpretative choices—which may or may not have been conscious acts of sabotage. As Venuti argues,

the activity of the translator, and that of the foreign author as well, is shaped by social determinations of which they may or may not be aware, linguistic, literary and historical materials which constitute their texts and may very well be beyond their intentions. (196)

It is precisely because of this "provisionality of meaning"—the ubiquitous possibilities for (un)consciously determined interpretations—that feminist translators make their presence in the text visible (Simon 29). Their visibility paradoxically allows readers a clearer view by reminding them that the translated

<sup>11</sup> For more about the problematic conflation and positioning of women and translations as inherently inferior see Lori Chamberlain, "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation." *Rethinking Translation*. Lawrence Venuti, ed. London: Routledge, 1992. 57-74.

text is a creative product that has moved beyond parameters of the language, culture and, in some cases, the ideology of the author.

Correspondingly, to Willson's observation of Borges's dismantling of Woolf's syntax, I would add a critical consideration of how his strategy affects the text's entire rhetorical structure. Much more than literary preferences are at play here. Borges not only subverted the "psychological" aspects of *A Room of One's Own* and *Orlando*, but inverted one of the text's most salient thematic expressions. Part of what makes Woolf's writing so innovative is her linking the syntax of her writings with her concept of a feminine experience of the physical world. In fact, Gilbert and Gubar argue that Virginia Woolf should be considered "the mother of all contemporary feminist linguistic theory" due precisely to the syntax and structures she employs (522).

*A Room of One's Own* is based on two papers Woolf read at the Arts Society at Newnham College, and the Odtas at Girton College in the fall of 1928. Written in the form of a lecture, the text is marked by a sense of orality, as if it were given aloud. The essay is intimate, informal, and interacts with its audience. In beginning her lecture, Woolf advises the attendees at her talk that she will be unable "to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantel-piece forever" (4). Truth (meaning) is so elusive and so subjective, "one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold" (4). *A Room of One's Own* intends to communicate the opinions it holds not only through the semantic value of Woolf's words, but through the essay's syntax itself.

Julie Vandivere argues that Woolf's linguistic style functions as a rhetorical statement whose interpretation "requires close, careful scrutiny of how her irregular phraseology and her pairing and multiplying of subjects, verbs, tense, and moods challenge reality, subjectivity, and hegemony" (231). To ignore these aspects of the text is to miss how the themes of *A Room of One's Own* and the style in which it was written are mutually dependent; Woolf's intention of demonstrating the manner in which she has arrived at her own conclusions is the basis for the essay's linguistic construction. Consistent with Gilbert and Gubar's assertion, Christiane Bimberg suggests, "The gaps, jumps, interruptions, retrospectives, repetitions, narrative 'inconsistencies' etc. are accepted by her as necessary steps on the way to tentative conclusions (6). Indeed, the principal argument of Woolf's text is that, since they have had no room of their own—leading to countless interruptions—women throughout the centuries have faced serious obstacles in the creation of literature. The countless, often apparently arbitrary interruptions of the narration are Woolf's strategic textual evidence of her point. Borges's "editing" of *A Room of One's Own*'s narrative style blocks Spanish-language readers' access to Woolf's innovative mode of synthesis for her feminist arguments. Much of the narration's

intentional arbitrariness, and consequently, its rhetorical function, were lost through Borges's impulse to make the translation more coherent.<sup>12</sup>

Consistent with what Willson noted in *Orlando*, in his translation of *A Room of One's Own*, Borges breaks long paragraphs into more digestible pieces without consideration of the textual effect they produce, and puts the narrator's unmarked interjections in parentheses or quotation. For example, in keeping with the text's tight correspondence between physical motion and the act of writing the narrator muses: "But why, I continued, moving on towards Headingley, have we stopped humming under our breath at luncheon parties?" (15). Borges puts an abrupt stop to the slightest meandering of the line and visibly marks a distinction between the narrated action and the narrator's thoughts: "¿Pero por qué, (proseguí yo, caminando hacia Headingley) hemos dejado de taeare *sotto voce* en los almuerzos y fiestas?" (17). (That Borges employs the Italian *sotto voce* to translate "under our breath" also alters the register of the passage.) In addition, Borges often highlights the narrator's significant points by restructuring the sentence, subordinating those arguments to the end of the sentence and prefacing them with a colon. "All this should be discussed and discovered; all this is part of the question of women and fiction" (77) becomes "Todo esto debe ser discutido y descubierto; todo esto es parte del problema: las mujeres y la novela" (70). (It is also noteworthy that Borges uses the word "problema" rather than the cognate "cuestión.")

There is a constant tendency on the part of Borges to "fix" the textual ramifications of Woolf's poetics of disjointedness and interruption. Mary Beton's explanation of her relief over no longer having to work since inheriting her aunt's fortune provides an excellent case in point:

To begin with, always to be doing work that one did not wish to do, and to do it like a slave, flattering and fawning, not always necessarily perhaps, but it seemed necessary and the stakes were too great to run risks; and then the thought of that one gift which it was death to hide—a small one but dear to the possessor—perishing and with it myself, my soul—all this became like a rust eating away at the bloom

<sup>12</sup> The intended effect of the text's grammatical manipulation and meandering plot was not lost on Borges alone. In a 1928 review of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf's literary rival Arnold Bennett critiques her "private notions about grammar" (258) and goes so far as to claim, "Virginia Woolf's thesis is not apparently important to her, since she talks about everything but the thesis. If her mind was not what it is I should accuse her of wholesale padding. This would be unjust. She is not guilty of padding. She is merely the victim of her extraordinary gift of fancy (not imagination). If I had to make one of those brilliant generalisations now so fashionable, defining the difference between men and women, I should say that whereas a woman cannot walk through a meadow in June without wandering all over the place to pick attractive blossoms, a man can. Virginia Woolf cannot resist the floral enticement" (259).

of the spring, destroying the tree at its heart. However, as I say, my aunt died... (37).

Woolf's syntax is unruly; her rambling interjections interrupt her own linear discourse. Borges was compelled to repair the broken syntax, the run-on sentences and arbitrary interjections—key parts of the text's rhetorical strategy.

El hecho inicial de estar continuamente haciendo algo que a uno no le gusta y de hacerlo como un esclavo, con acompañamiento de lisonjas y adulaciones, quizás no imprescindibles, pero a mí me lo parecían y no quería correr ningún riesgo; y el pensamiento de aquel don solitario cuya ocultación comporta la muerte—un don pequeño pero caro a su poseedor—perciendo y mi alma con él; todo eso era como una herrumbre devorando la frescura de la primavera, destruyendo el corazón del árbol. Sin embargo, como les estaba diciendo, murió mi tía... (35)<sup>13</sup>

Less disjointed and sporadic, Borges's text has smooth transitions, and clearly defined subjects. The first three fragments are subsumed into one, eliminating the jumpy sensation one derives from the English. The verbs "flattering" and "fawning" are turned into nouns which "accompany" the undesirable labor. In the second clause Borges avoids repeating terms by making the passive voice active, adding "me" where there was no object in the English text. The fact that the stakes were too high to avoid flattery, that Mary Beton had something to lose, is lost in Spanish, where she simply didn't want to "run the risk." Apart from the actual syntax of the passage, which exemplifies his translation strategy throughout the essay, Borges's choice for translating "slave" is also problematic. Despite the fact that a woman is narrating, he chooses "esclavo" rather than "esclava." By generalizing the term to the masculine, Borges reduces the force of her statement, negating her claim that women in particular have had to work like slaves. Similarly, Borges uses "poseedor" rather than the feminine "poseedora" when referring the possessor of the gift of writing. This neutralization or masculinization of undetermined or even specifically female referents characterizes Borges's translation from the very first page.

To further analyze Borges's grammatical shifts of gender I turn to *A Room of One's Own's* famous opening line: "But, you may say, we asked you to speak

<sup>13</sup> Translated back:

The initial fact of continually doing what one doesn't like and doing it like a slave, along with flattery and praise, perhaps not indispensable, but they seemed so to me and I didn't want to run any risk; and the thought of that solitary gift which is like death to hide—a small gift but valuable to its possessor—perishing and my soul with it; all of this was like a rust devouring the freshness of spring, destroying the heart of the tree. However, as I was telling you, my aunt died;...

about women and fiction—what has that got to do with a room of one's own?" (1). In Spanish, the first person plural "we" is a gendered pronoun: it is "nosotras" if the members of the group are all women and "nosotros" if the members are all male or if the group is mixed. The linguistic power of the masculine is such that even in a group of one hundred women and one man, the group would still refer to itself to as "nosotros." We know from Woolf's frequent interaction with her audience that it is entirely female. In Chapter Two, when discussing her research on women and poverty, she asks her audience, "Are you aware that you are, perhaps, the most discussed animal in the universe?" (26). And in Chapter Five she invokes Radclyffe Hall's recent obscenity trial, asking "Are there no men present? Do you promise me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Chartres Biron is not concealed?" (80). Despite their obvious absence from the text, Borges seems to find himself to be that single man added to the group who tips the linguistic scales. He translates: "Pero, dirán ustedes, *nosotros* le pedimos que hablara sobre las mujeres y la novela—¿qué tendrá eso que ver con un cuarto propio?" (7, my emphasis). In a more neutral approach, as Spanish verbs are synthetic, able to indicate the subject through the verb ending, Borges could have avoided any indication of the audience's gender by simply leaving off the term for we, "le pedimos que hablara..."

The very fact that *A Room of One's Own* deals primarily with issues of women and writing seems to come into conflict with Borges's own sense of narrative authority. Despite his tendency for self-effacement, he was often unforgiving in his criticism of other authors. In the Argentine periodical *El Hogar* of October 1936, Borges had the following to say about Virginia Woolf herself: "She is the daughter of Mr. Leslie Stephen, editor of the biographies of Swift, Jonson and Hobbes, books whose value lies in the clarity of their prose and the precision of their facts, and that they make little attempt at analysis and never any invention" ("Virginia Woolf" 122, my translation). This description was, of course, in satirical contrast with Woolf's fictional biography *Orlando*. In the same article, Borges obliquely questions the value and validity of Woolf's work because it was self-published by the Hogarth Press: "In 1912, Virginia Stephen married Mr. Leonard Woolf and the two acquired a press. They were attracted by typography, literature's occasionally traitorous accomplice, and they wrote and edited their own texts" (122-23, my translation). Skepticism about Woolf and women's writing in general appears to manifest itself in his translation through consistent subversion of their work and their intelligence, often in the form of subtle shifts in vocabulary.

When considering all of the new books being published by women, Woolf writes: "There are books on all sorts of subjects which a generation ago no woman could have touched" (78). In Spanish, however, it becomes not a question of women being allowed to write on a certain subject ("pudiera haber tocado"

or "hubiera podido tocar"), but, rather, they were simply not motivated to write about traditionally non-feminine subjects—those that no woman "could have touched" become subjects that no woman "would have garnered the enthusiasm to take on": "Hay libros sobre todos los temas que ninguna mujer de la generación anterior se *hubiera animado a abordar*" (71, my emphasis). Woolf's allegory about Judith Shakespeare exemplifies her point that women were not permitted to write, despite their genuine interest or ability. As her miserable fate makes clear, contrary to the implications of the translation, she was indeed driven to write to the point of sacrificing her family and security.

Consistent with Borges's choice of terms, he also employs phrasing that transforms women from gifted to merely aspiring to write. When describing Judith Shakespeare's choice to abandon her home, Woolf indicates: "The force of her own gift alone drove her to it" (47). "Gift" refers to an innate quality, rather than one that entails labor to acquire. Yet instead of the word "don" which is the direct translation of "gift," Borges translated: "La fuerza de su *vocación* la impulsó" (44, my emphasis). "Vocation" implies a natural inclination, but not necessarily a successful fulfillment of that leaning. As is demonstrated above in his translation of Mary Beton's story about her inheritance, Borges does translate "gift" as "don" in other parts of the essay, suggesting this may have been a motivated decision on his part. He makes a similar decision on the next page: "yet," the narrator adds, "her genius was for fiction and lusted to feed abundantly upon the lives of men and women and the study of their ways" (48). Similar to "gift," "genius" refers to a quality one is born with, rather than a characteristic one must work for; it connotes a near-perfect ability to use one's gift. Borges once more divorces women writers from their natural talent: "Sin embargo, su *inclinación* era novelística y requería alimentarse infinitamente de vidas de hombres y de mujeres y del estudio de sus modos de ser" (44, my emphasis). Here, Judith's "genius for fiction" has been transformed to her "novelistic inclination," a choice of words which masks the crucial parallel of Woolf's argument: that Judith's talent was equal to that of her brother.

Borges's substitution of "fiction" for "novel" reinforces a notion Woolf seeks to dismantle with her essay—that women can only write novels. Woolf frequently employs the term "fiction" in her text; curiously, Borges never once uses the Spanish cognate, "ficción."<sup>14</sup> Rather, he uses "literature," "the novel," and even "fable." In his translation, the opening line of *Un cuarto propio* reads: "we asked you to speak about women and the novel" (7, my translation), instead of "women

<sup>14</sup> Coincidentally, his most famous compilation of short stories is called *Ficciones* (1944). While one may argue that the term "la ficción" might have seemed more awkward than "la novela," in one story from the anthology—"El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan"—Borges employs "las ficciones" as a generalized term with a connotation very much like that of Woolf (574 and 575).

and fiction" as it does in English. Problematically, the substitution of "novel" works directly against Woolf's famous claim that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction."

Chapter Four of the essay is an inquiry into why almost all literature by women is written in the form of the novel. As women were forced to write without privacy in the common sitting-room, subject to frequent interruptions and often compelled to hide their work, Woolf finds, "it would be easier to write prose and fiction there than to write poetry or a play" (66). She also determines that having little legacy of their own, writers such as Jane Austen found "the novel alone was young enough to be soft in her hands" (76). But with a room of one's own, Woolf questions whether even the novel will remain "rightly shaped" for women's use. "No doubt we shall find her knocking that into shape for herself when she has the free use of her limbs; and providing some new vehicle, not necessarily in verse, for the poetry in her" (76). Consequently, when Borges translates, "para escribir novelas, una mujer debe tener dinero y un cuarto propio" he is specifically limiting women writers to the very form Woolf seeks to explode (7, my emphasis). One may concede that Woolf primarily uses the term "fiction" when talking about women and writing (as the theme of her talk indicates), rather than poetry or drama. Yet when we take into consideration her anticipation of a new genre for women writers that is both fictional and poetic, the specificity of Borges's "novela" still problematically limits Woolf's greater-encompassing "fiction."

In her own form of genre bending, Woolf deflates the importance of the author/narrator by using "one" instead of "I" and claiming, "call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please—it is not a matter of any importance" (5). Reversing her strategy—perhaps to avoid a proliferation of feminine articles—Borges consistently translates "one" as "yo" (I) or "nosotros" (we, masculine). The anonymity of Woolf's line, "if by good luck there had been an ash-tray handy, if one had not knocked the ash out of the window in default... one would not have seen, presumably, a cat without a tail," is voided with Borges's imposition of the first person (11). Rather, Borges converts "one" into "I" and "me": "Si la casualidad me hubiera deparado un cenicero, si a falta de cenicero no hubiera tirado la ceniza por la ventana...yo verosimilmente no hubiera visto un gato sin cola" (14, my emphasis). In reference to facts, Woolf often opted for "one" rather than "I," perhaps to emphasize their objectivity. At the British Museum, for example, overcome by the proliferation of queries her research generated, she laments: "But one needed answers, not questions" (25). Yet in Spanish, it was she herself rather than people in general who needed answers: "Pero yo precisaba contestaciones, no preguntas" (25, my emphasis). Through her technique of using the third person, Woolf sought to avoid the problems of Mr. A's novel, in which "a shadow seemed to lie across the page. It was a straight dark

bar...something like the letter 'I'" (98). Borges's translation strategy, however, revives the translator as that "I," casting his own shadow across the page. His insistence on grammatical normativization, whether conscious or unconscious have, quite like Mr. A, blocked our view of what lies behind them—in this case, an innovative style for undermining impositions of patriarchal authority.

While negating the exclusivity of first-person pronouns, Woolf did employ other means to assert her authority as both a writer and a critic. Despite her claim to have no university training, Woolf quotes or refers to numerous authors and journalists who have been writing in Europe from the sixteenth century on. At times her references are oblique, and only a well-educated reader would be able to pick them out, while at others she not only quotes an author but includes a footnote with the bibliographical information from which she is citing—most often when the author under scrutiny has a misogynist message that Woolf seeks to expose.

As will especially be noted in *Three Guineas*,<sup>15</sup> footnotes serve to establish the author's credibility by letting the reader know she is aware of and has read outside sources that contribute to the dialogue she is putting forth; they show her adeptness for the subject at hand. And most importantly, they provide her readers the references they may use to find this information for themselves, either to learn more about the matter or simply to see that she is indeed a credible author. Borges pilfers Woolf's (inter)textual authority by eliminating nine of her twelve footnotes in *Un cuarto propio*. It seems difficult to concede that this choice was for aesthetic reasons rather than through simple disregard of Woolf's authority, because he did include certain references (Boswell, Frazer and Davies), and when dealing with the poetry cited in *A Room*, Borges left it in English and included a translation of the poems specifically as footnotes.<sup>16</sup>

Woolf's extratextual reference was an additional way to "show how one came to hold whatever opinion she does hold" (4)—specifically, the feminist sentiment that women could function as authorities on a given subject. Feminism was a hotly debated concept in Britain at the time of *A Room*'s publication. A decade later, in Argentina, the situation was much the same. After decades of a strong feminist presence in the nation, a bill proposing women's suffrage finally passed the Chamber of Deputies and made it before the Senate in 1932. A growing backlash against feminism during the 1930s resulted in this historic bill being shelved, never making it to the floor for debate. In 1936—the year Victoria Ocampo published Borges's translation of *A Room*—proposals were made to reform the Civil Code

<sup>15</sup> See Vara Neverow and Merry Pawlowski. "Preliminary Bibliographic Guide to the Footnotes of *Three Guineas*." *Woolf Studies Annual* 3 (1997). 170-210.

<sup>16</sup> In the essay's first publication in the journal *Sur*, none of Woolf's notes appeared, nor were there any translations of the English language poetry. Spanish translations in the form of footnotes and three of Woolf's original citations were added for the publication as a book.

and rescind many of the rights women had already won. In addition to publishing the translation of *Un cuarto propio*, Lavrin notes that during this period, Ocampo made a "fleeting intervention in the feminist cause" with the publication of several articles denouncing various bills that proposed increased limitations to women's rights (283). While Borges, on the other hand, did not publish any commentary either for or against the feminist movement, his translation strategy for the very term "feminist" may be indicative of his position.

Mocking the threat men felt from feminism, Woolf describes how shocking they found women's disapproval:

Does it explain my astonishment of the other day when Z, most humane, most modest of men, taking up some book by Rebecca West and reading a passage in it exclaimed "The arrant feminist! She says that men are snobs!" The exclamation, to me so surprising—for why was Miss West an arrant feminist for making a possibly true if uncomplimentary statement about the other sex? (35).

The word feminist has a qualifier, "arrant," which Woolf uses throughout the essay. In Borges's translation, the elimination of that qualifier gives the passage an entirely new connotation:

¿Sirve para explicar mi asombro del otro día cuando Z, el más comprensivo y modesto de los hombres, tomó un libro de Rebecca West y exclamó: '¡Qué feminista! ¡dice que todos los hombres son snobs!' Esa exclamación sorprendente — ¿pues qué tenía de feminista Miss West al formular una declaración quizá verdadera, aunque algo descortés, sobre el otro sexo?' (33, my emphasis).

Rather than an "arrant feminist," Z says of Miss West: "What a feminist!<sup>17</sup> She says all men are snobs!" while the narrator inquires, "what is so feminist about Miss West...?" In both versions, Z disparages feminists; without the qualifier, however, the irony of the remark is annulled. "Feminist" and the claim that all men are snobs become synonymous, and being feminist becomes inherently reprehensible. Later in the text, Woolf refers back to her comment, "Men, of course, are not snobs, I continued, carefully eschewing the 'arrant feminism' of Miss Rebecca West" (57). This time, however, Borges does provide a qualifier—though not exactly accurate: "Los hombres, por supuesto, no son snobs, proseguí, evitando cuidadosamente 'el feminismo notorio' de Miss Rebecca West" (53,

<sup>17</sup> An alternative translation of the Spanish "¡Qué feminista!" could also be "How feminist!"

my emphasis). While "arrant" refers specifically to Miss West, "notorious" also brings in the opinion of the public who unquestioningly censure feminism.

While his strategy appears to categorically define Borges's disapproval of feminism, many critics are quick to cite an interview with Oswaldo Ferrari in which Borges calls himself "feminista." In the same interview, he mentions his reluctance to translate Woolf, and, perhaps to distance himself from the text, alleges that his mother actually translated *A Room of One's Own* while he merely revised it. Since, he claims, he was already a feminist, convinced of the essay's message, the text was of little interest to him (Borges and Ferrari 12).<sup>18</sup> The diary of Borges's closest friend and collaborator, Adolfo Bioy Casares, provides another picture. Published posthumously in 2006, the immense volume details the writers' almost daily interaction. As late as 1968, Borges's opinion of women appears decidedly anti-feminist. Discussing among male friends the issue of women and Sir Thomas Browne's lamentation that human beings cannot procreate the way trees do, Borges stated "I don't believe that is where women's defect lies [their genitals]. It's in their brains." He added, "Samuel Johnson was right when he said that if a woman preached, one shouldn't praise her for doing it well, but for doing it at all, as one would for a dog who stands [sic] on his back legs" (Bioy Casares 1256, my translation). The irony will not escape a reader of *A Room of One's Own* that Woolf uses this very quote by Johnson to illustrate how women are not taken seriously as composers of music.

Borges's semantic choices such as "vocación" for a woman's "gift" and "inclinación" for her "genius" would appear to point toward a personal opinion that the problem with women did indeed lie with "their brains." It is of little surprise, then, that in the most telling case of mistranslation, Borges dispossesses the narrator of her most valuable possession, her power of thought. A famous line

<sup>18</sup> As a scholar, I do not put much credence into Borges's statements regarding his mother and translation; in his autobiographical essay he claims his mother not only translated Woolf but also other important authors whose translations are attributed to him, such as Faulkner and Melville. Yet later in the text he describes working on these same authors' translations during the weekends while he worked at the Biblioteca Nacional (*Ensayo autobiográfico* 14, 77). Borges similarly contradicts himself in a public interview with his English translator Thomas di Giovanni when he claims first that his mother did the translations while he revised them, and immediately reverses and says he did the translations while she revised them (Christ 407). Emir Rodríguez Monegal might come closest to truth when he writes: "A lapse in memory, a friendly hoax, a filial accolade? It is hard to say. Probably Mother helped him with those translations. She may have even done the first draft. But the Spanish style is so unmistakably Borgesian that it would have taken Mother years of hard labor to be able to imitate it" (293).



of the essay reads: "Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (75). This challenging cry is smoothed over, the authoritative "mind" is replaced by the airy and feminine "spirit": "Cierren sus bibliotecas si quieren; pero no hay puertas, ni cerradura, ni cerrojo que cierre la libertad de mi *espíritu*" (68, my emphasis). Borges's translation seems to be ushering the angel back into the house.

Even as Woolf satirizes the kind of peroration whose exhortations to be higher and more spiritual she will leave "to the other sex," Borges's choice in language blindly affirms the restrictive roles past which she is trying to push her audience. His translation of her declaration, "When I rummage in my own mind I find no noble sentiments about being companions and equals and influencing the world to higher ends" (109) again inscribes a transformation of Woolf's mind into her spirit: "Al revolver mi propio *espíritu* no encuentro el sentimiento noble de que todos [*sic*] somos compañeras e iguales y debemos encaminar el mundo a fines más altos" (98, my emphasis).

Unlike the many other occasions when Borges opts to masculinize terms of indeterminate gender, here he translates "companions" as "compañeras" rather than the general/masculine "compañeros." It is interesting that Borges includes the word "todos," as in "we are all companions and equals," when it wasn't present in the English, not least because the combination of male and female suffixes in reference to the same object, "todos somos compañeras," is grammatically incorrect. It could potentially be used as a neologism to create gender ambiguity, but in other editions (UNAM Editorial) the phrase has been edited to read the specifically feminine "todas somos compañeras" (194). Given Borges's tendency to eliminate gender ambiguity, this non-correspondence may likely be an error. Were it in recognition of the fact that "companions and equals" could refer to both women and men, all previous indications point to him choosing the male default. A possibility may be that Borges was trying to capture the universality of "all" but make it grammatically impossible for women and men to be companions and equals through the exclusivity of the feminine noun ending, "-as," whereby companionship and equality could exist only among women. In any case, upon arriving at the peroration, Borges seems finally to have realized that the audience being addressed is comprised solely of women; like the exclusive "compañeras," he translates Woolf's admonition to "be oneself" as "ser una misma," not "ser uno mismo." This was not enough, however, to make him go back and correct the first five chapters.

With the mind/spirit question, Borges could not have been mistranslating accidentally. On the contrary, he quite effectively manages to imprint his beliefs onto the text, as he makes a perfectly accurate translation of the term within the same chapter: "Still you may say that the mind should rise above such things"

(105). Here, "mind" becomes "intelligence": "Pueden sin embargo decir que la *inteligencia* debe sobreponerse a estas cosas" (94, my emphasis). It would seem that mind only becomes spirit when it is a woman who is speaking or being discussed. William Shakespeare, on the other hand, is allowed his own mind. But the fact that it is of "the androgynous, of the man-womanly mind" (97) appears to make the translator uncomfortable as well. Borges reduces the number of adjectives describing Shakespeare's mind to one: "*inteligencia andrógina*" (88). As I have written elsewhere (see n. 10), Borges has a tendency to eliminate gender ambiguity in a text by either assigning a subject a gender or by eliminating non-normative language altogether. One can only speculate about the reasons behind his translations' unyielding disapproval of feminism, of women writers and of gender ambiguity. It must be deceptively simple to entertain Woolf's suggestion that "possibly when the professor insisted a little too emphatically upon the inferiority of women, he was concerned not with their inferiority, but with his own superiority" (34)

Borges is correct in affirming that a text, once published, takes on a life of its own. As an English language text, *A Room of One's Own* has come under intense scrutiny by feminists. As Gubar writes in her introduction to the 2005 annotated edition of *A Room of One's Own*:

while Woolf has been attacked as too angry in her caricaturing of men, she has concomitantly been chastened for being fearful of rage, put off by the all too justifiable rancor of her female predecessors. Similarly, she has been denounced both for inflating and for deflating women's cultural achievements. Although praised as quasi-Marxist in her materialism, she has been trounced for an elitism inculcated by her relatively privileged background. Heralded as an anti-imperialist, critical of England and Empire...she nevertheless has been taken to task as a racist, unconscious of her biases about third-world societies and people of color. (lviii)

These critiques, however, have been about a work that has been permitted to speak for itself. If, as Borges argues, texts are to be permitted to fulfill whatever function the reading public requires, his translation is not living up to its duty. *Un cuarto propio* is being read in Spanish as a feminist text, but much of what distinguishes it within the feminist canon is missing. To advance the important debates currently being generated by the essay, one must have access to a responsible representation of what the text actually says and the manner in which it was expressed in English.

Due to the limited availability of alternative Spanish translations of *A Room of One's Own*, my access has been exclusively to the *Cuarto Propio* edition by Moure and Moreno, and to personal correspondence with the A-Z edition's translator, Gambolini. Moure and Moreno have published no information about their choice

to adapt Borges's translation, as opposed to creating their own, or about what they found problematic with his version. In their adaptation, I have found problems quite similar to those of the Borges translation: "nosotros" for "we" instead of "nosotras"; "novela" for "fiction" instead of "ficción"; "espíritu" for "mind" instead of "inteligencia" or "mente." Nor does the syntax change to more closely match the techniques employed by Woolf. And the text has eliminated all of Woolf's footnotes. Moure and Moreno appear to be more concerned with updating vocabulary for current usage than with "fixing" any mishandling of gender on the part of Borges. One hopes that other translations, particularly that by Horas y Horas, make a more responsible feminist rendering of *A Room of One's Own*, and that a feminist translation soon becomes widely available.

At the same time, part of Borges's translation's "life of its own" is the fact that it embodies a concrete act of anti-feminism. It is not an exaggeration to state that the damage already done by Borges's translation is incalculable. Yet despite his subversive intervention, the feminist message contained within *Un cuarto propio* has made its mark on generations of Spanish language readers. Translation has always called the role of the author/authority into question, but the curious position of Borges's translation as both a feminist and inherently anti-feminist work provides a unique case of textual resistance in action. Even as Borges sabotages the essay through edited syntax, semantic glass ceilings and blatant omissions, Woolf's authority as a leading feminist writer has somehow remained intact. The fact that a translator should be compelled to dismantle the feminist foundations of *A Room of One's Own* effectively functions as a meta-commentary on the same assertions Woolf seeks to prove with her essay. In his process of translation, Borges is demonstrating precisely the patriarchal obstacles outlined by Woolf that long kept women from producing literature. Viewed as such, Borges adds a potentially useful layer to Woolf's text. The Spanish language reader who is alerted to the embattled nature of *Un cuarto propio* would be in a position to benefit from the problems of his translation. Namely, an annotated edition of Borges's *Un cuarto propio* would be of immeasurable use; it could expose the translation's numerous subversions of Woolf's text and provide more appropriate/accurate phrasing, along with an explanation of how the Borges version is in conflict with the English. Readers would gain access both to the problematic aspects of Borges's decision-making process, as well as the feminist-oriented choices of the editor/translator who offers alternatives. Using the anti-feminist techniques of Borges's translation as a way to comment upon and advance the feminist message of the text itself would offer more than poetic justice. The visible demonstration of how language can function as a tool for both undermining and reclaiming feminist poetics and aesthetics would function as a testament to the power of Woolf's message in *A Room of One's Own*.

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## Animal Life and Human Sacrifice in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*<sup>1</sup>

Vicki Tromanhauser

For the local villagers in *Between the Acts*, tormented by their dread of the coming war—"The doom of sudden death hanging over us" (70)—the annual pageant play and its depiction of scenes from English history offer a welcome relief from their present reality in June 1939. Like Mrs. Manresa and William Dodge, who are "lured off the high road by the very same instinct that caused the sheep and cows to desire propinquity," the villagers flock to the country house of Pointz Hall where the pageant is to be held (25). Having surveyed the grounds of Pointz Hall earlier that year, the pageant's director Miss La Trobe staked out the perfect site for her stage in a grassy terrace or "stretch of high ground" that "Nature had provided" (9). The natural stage drops off into a field where cows bellow and swallows dart between the trees, so that as the villagers take their seats on the lawn to watch their history play out, "The very cows joined in. Walloping, tail lashing, the reticence of nature was undone, and the barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute were dissolved" (109). In placing her theater outside, La Trobe shows the distinction between human mastery and animal nature to be illusory. Gazing past the actors onto grazing cows and darting swallows, the village audience loses its stretch of cultural "high ground" and encounters the prospect of humanity joining the herd.

In the face of imminent German invasion and cultural obsolescence, La Trobe's pageant, like the novel itself, confronts its audience with the question of how the human species understands its life and the limits of its qualitative difference from its animal neighbors. La Trobe's parodic production of England's past begins to tell against a concept of cultural identity as necessarily grounded in hierarchies of class, gender, and species: commoners are cast in the roles of monarchs and other prominent national figures; costume and style replace monumental events as markers of period; the Grand Ensemble and its homage to the imperial army are silently dropped; and the cows take their part in the choral song. For Woolf the coming war was not simply about geographical or national borders, but about the borders of the kind of life that is to be considered properly cultural, and thus inscribed within history's pageant, and the kind of life that must be purged, or even sacrificed, from its midst.

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