
Written six centuries apart, both the work of Don Juan Manuel from Toledo and the Argentine Jorge Luis Borges have captivated scholars and led to a lengthy academic bibliography that is difficult to review comprehensively. In order to decipher the multiple dimensions of some their most famous texts, many studies were forced to transcend literary criticism and turn to diverse disciplines such as philology, history, psychology or philosophy. A superficial overview of this vast critical tradition leaves one with the impression that everything has already been said about both authors and that to produce an original study on the subject is a task that is as difficult as it is futile. Nevertheless, the brief yet thought-provoking book by Jorge Wiesse Rebagliati – *El mago y el brujo. El Exenplo XI de El Conde Lucanor de don Juan Manuel y El brujo postergado de Jorge Luis Borges* – makes a real contribution to the understanding of two famous stories by these authors. Originally prepared by Jorge Wiesse for a presentation at the University of Fribourg, the essay tackles “Exenplo XI” by Juan Manuel with its contemporary rewriting by Borges, “El brujo postergado.”

The book analyzes, from a literary perspective, the intertextual relationship between both stories in light of Borges’ traductology. If Borgean conceptions about translation determine the purpose and guide the argument of this work, they do not restrict its development. Thus, the first part draws on the best critical approaches that explain substantial issues related both to *El conde Lucanor* in general – the genre of exemplum, the structure, the narrative voices; as well as “Exenplo XI” in particular – the narrative spaces, the topics, and the literary strategies. In turn, the second section of the book examines Borges’ version. Jorge Wiesse maintains that the coincidences and discrepancies between the medieval hypotext and contemporary hypertext have to do with the Argentine writer’s ideas about intertextuality. It is on this proposition that the principal conclusion of this study rests: more than a contemporary adaptation of the “Exenplo XI” of Don Juan Manuel, *El brujo postergado* is an act of rewriting that puts into practice the principle of Borgean traductology.

The study starts with an informative review of the Don Juan Manuel critical tradition, useful for both novices and specialists. In the first pages, Wiesse stresses various decisive aspects of *El conde Lucanor*: the structural originality of the exempla – which starts from and moves beyond the medieval genre; the tripartite (exempla, sententia, argumenta) and ascending (from the simple to the complex, from the narrative to the doctrinal, etc.) division of the book; and the notable confluence of three narrative voices – that of the author of the general prologue, that of the narrator of the exempla, and the person that narrates each of the tales. This coherent panorama of the work precedes his proposed interpretation of “Exenplo XI.” Without passing over the folkloric roots of the story, the author emphasizes
the handling of the narrative space, discusses the issues of magic and of sacrifice, and
takes an in-depth look at the decisive role of the word as a support of the magical illusion.

The principal contribution is to be found in the last part of the book: an intertextual analysis
between “Exenplo XI” and El brujo postergado according to the Borgean theory of translation.
As Wiesse points out, Borges believed that the act of translation was not limited to flipping
the text into a different language, but also implied a transformation. For Borges, faithfulness
to the text led to a “copy”; meanwhile, literary translation should rather aspire to the creation
of a new “version” with significant changes vis à vis the original source. Guided by these ideas,
Jorge Wiesse explains the similarities and differences using four of the five characteristics
of Borgean traductology recognized by Efraín Kristal: the omission of the “filling” or those
elements of the story considered to be dispensable, the suppression of “textual distractions,”
the scorn for some essential themes, and the accentuation of less important ones. This analysis
leads him to the conclusion that while Don Juan Manuel considered that one should be faithful
to texts and rejected any kind of modification of the original, Borges treated canonical works
with an irreverent attitude, modifying them, reordering them, rearranging their emphases,
and linking them with false literary sources. El brujo postergado should not be read as a mere
translation. Through its omissions and emphases, it manages to emancipate itself from its
medieval source in order to renew and resemantize it.

Freed from the ideological tendencies of current literary criticism, El mago y el brujo seems
more related to the ancient Horacian principle of prodesse et delectare: it reconciles its
pedagogical purpose, reviewing the prestigious exegeses of El conde Lucanor and the

Nevertheless, Wiesse’s achievement does not lie solely in the description of the characteristics
and virtues of these versions and in explaining the alterations in the Borgean story, drawing
on Borges’ vision of the literary tradition. He is also able to find in this version aspects that
were previously unnoticed by those who study the work of Don Juan Manuel. Wiesse’s essay
clarifies the motivations that led the Argentine writer to adapt “Exenplo XI” to the 20th
century with erudition and lucidity, and takes advantage of these to suggest and formulate
new issues related to both texts. The books starts with the ideas of Borges, but is not limited
to these, and proposes a reading that both pays homage to these ideas and goes beyond them.

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