

## Chapter 93

# Gender, Translation, and Censorship: *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) in Spain as an Example of Translation in Cultural Evolution

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### ABSTRACT

*After the “cultural turn” in the 1980s, translation was redefined as a cultural transfer rather than a linguistic transposition. Key translation concepts were revised, including equivalence, correction, and fidelity. Feminist approaches to translation emerged, for example, the recovery of texts lost in patriarchy. Following the death of Franco and the transition to democracy, Spain initiated a cultural expansion. The advent of the Franco regime after the civil war (1936-1939) resulted in years of cultural involution and the abolition of rights for women attained during the Spanish Second Republic (1931-1939). Severe censoring prevented the publication of literature—both native and foreign (through translation)—that contradicted the principles of the dictatorship. This chapter will examine the link between gender, translation, and censorship, materialised in Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), the first English novel to tackle lesbianism and transgenderism, an example of translation in cultural evolution.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Spanish Second Republic (1931-1939) was a period of cultural effervescence and concretion of rights for women in Spain. The end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the advent of the Francoist dictatorship (1939-1975) resulted in years of cultural involution and sterility. Women were negatively impacted by Spain’s severe social relapse. A censorial apparatus was established to filter literature and ideas contradicting the regime. Despite efforts by translators and editors, large amounts of English literature did not make it to Spain. Entire pieces of work were denied publication. Additionally, several

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works suffered internal censorship as sentences, paragraphs, and sections were suppressed (López, 2000). Today, not only are key works by major English novelists unavailable in Spanish (those that suffered full censorship), but others (where partial censorship was performed) are abridged versions of their original texts, as is the case of older publications currently in circulation. This can affect the Spanish reader's image of the many English novelists affected. It may also, as a whole, influence the literary image of the source culture.

Researchers have studied the impact of translation on the literary history of cultures (Massardier-Kenney, 1997). However, some aspects (such as the censoring apparatus) have had few studies, including how it worked, the agents engaged in the process (i.e., reader, censor, censorship board), and the process itself (from the editor's request for publication to the work's acceptance or rejection). There is limited research on the translation process, including who translated whom, how, when, who ordered the translations, and who for.

Recurrent translator names appear for specific literature, such as the case of English literature from women novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Little is known about these repeated names. In most novels, they are reduced to a timid name on the novel's credit page as though they are an unimportant agent who are not responsible for their performance of rewriting a source text or key text. This is true for Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), the first English novel to tackle lesbianism and transgenderism. In addition, little is known about their contract with the editor within the commissioned work, how they dealt with censorship, or whether self-censorship was recommended to avoid future censorship or subterfuge.

Another aspect that deserves specific reflection is the censorship files that contain the justification for a work's rejection (i.e., judgemental comments based on ideological fidelity to the Francoist regime). It is important to note the difficulty in tracking censorship files. It is even more challenging to know which of the books in use are censored versions.

This period in Spain's history illustrates the changing role of the translator: from invisible to actively present in translated text. In the 1980s, the cultural turn in translation studies coincided with Spain's first democratic government (Godard, 1977/1990). During this time, translation transcended linguistic transposition and focused on cultures. "Since languages express cultures, translators should be bicultural, not bilingual" (Lefevere & Bassnett, as quoted in Vidal, 1998, p. 51). It was in this cultural turn—and new context of liberty reinstatement and cultural momentum—that translators made themselves visible. They chose to translate a specific writer and assert their active presence in the translated text (Godard, 1983). Through footnotes or prefaces, they reflected on the author, text, and/or the inner translation act (i.e., existing translation strategies adapted for a specific cause; Massardier-Kenney, 1997).

The translation of Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* into Spanish is an example of the link between gender, translation, and censorship during the Francoist regime. It illustrates the evolution of translation and the translator's agency: from invisibility in the translated work's credits page to a full signature on the inner cover of the text as a commercial device and guarantee of translation quality. It was increasingly understood that translation was an act that entailed difficulties beyond linguistic transfer. Several other factors were considered, including who translates, for whom, where, and why. *The Well of Loneliness* also shows that translation does not start and finish at the inner linguistic exchange. It demonstrates the endurance of translation, while reflecting on political, social, and cultural settings.

Today, two Spanish versions of *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) exist. Yet, a new version will not substitute for a previous one. Each is a cultural reflection of the context (time and place) in which it is embedded and of the translation norms prevailing at a specific time (Toury, 1995). Since translations are an integral part of a broader social, historical, and literary framework, it is possible to identify the

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